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Striving for the Mastery



Striving for the Mastery

A DAY-BOOK FOR LENT

BY
WYLLYS REDE, D.D.
11

"Every man that striveth for the
mastery is temperate in all things."

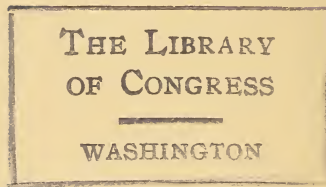


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PREFACE.

THESE meditations were made with my people at the close of Evensong, day by day, last Lent. They are now put into print with the hope that two classes of people may welcome them.

1. Hard-worked parish priests, who find no time for the preparation of such a series year by year, and yet desire to help their people to draw nigh to God in the practice of devout meditation during Lent.

2. Devout Christians, who are accustomed to spend some part of each day in Lent in spiritual reading, and many of whom are deprived of Church privileges. The number of such earnest souls is increasing every year.

It has proved impossible, amidst the busy activities of parish life, to revise as carefully as I might have wished, the work which was struck off under pressure day by day. But perhaps after all it is best that the meditations should retain the simple and sometimes fragmentary forms into which they first shaped themselves, rather than the more symmetrical outlines which a colder criticism might have given them. Traces may be found in them of "books

which have influenced me," but it is manifestly impossible to give credit in detail to the authors from whom in the heat of hasty preparation suggestions were received. My only motive in giving to the world this book, of whose imperfections I am painfully well aware, is to encourage some souls to renew the spiritual combat, and fight it to the end.

WYLLYS REDE.

St. Andrew's Day, 1895.

CONTENTS.

FIRST WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Self.

ASH WEDNESDAY—	PAGE.
Keeping Under the Body	I
THURSDAY—	
Governing the Mind	6
FRIDAY—	
Bridling the Tongue	II
SATURDAY—	
The Subjugation of the Will	16

SECOND WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Temptation.

MONDAY—	
The Trial of our Faith	21
TUESDAY—	
Does God Lead us into Temptation?	26
WEDNESDAY—	
Is it a Sin to be Tempted?	31
THURSDAY—	
Temptation to Distrust God	36

FRIDAY—	PAGE.
Presumption and False Confidence.	41
SATURDAY—	
Doing Evil that Good may Come	46

THIRD WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over the World.

MONDAY—	
Is the World our Friend or our Enemy?	51
TUESDAY—	
Overcoming the Evil that is in the World	56
WEDNESDAY—	
Overcoming the World by Faith	62
THURSDAY—	
Nonconformity to the World	66
FRIDAY—	
Crucifying the World	71
SATURDAY—	
The Profit and Loss of Worldliness	76

FOURTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Adversity.

MONDAY—	
The School of Life	79
TUESDAY—	
The Poverty of Spirit	86
WEDNESDAY—	
By Meekness	91

Contents.

ix

THURSDAY—	PAGE.
By Mourning	96
FRIDAY—	
By Making Peace	101
SATURDAY—	
Through Persecution	106

FIFTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Sin.

MONDAY—	
The Mystery of Iniquity	112
TUESDAY—	
The Pervasiveness of Sin	118
WEDNESDAY—	
The Deceitfulness of Sin	124
THURSDAY—	
The Lawlessness of Sin	130
FRIDAY—	
The Malignity of Sin	136
SATURDAY—	
The Mystery of Godliness	142

PASSION WEEK.

The Mastery Over Suffering.

MONDAY—	
Betrayal	148
TUESDAY—	
Misjudgment	154

WEDNESDAY—	PAGE.
Poverty	160
THURSDAY—	
Bodily Suffering	166
FRIDAY—	
Mental Suffering	172
SATURDAY—	
The Reward of Suffering	178

HOLY WEEK.

The Mastery Over Death

MONDAY—	
What is Death?	184
TUESDAY—	
Obedience unto Death	190
WEDNESDAY—	
Love Stronger than Death	196
MAUNDY THURSDAY—	
The Blessing of a Finished Life	202
GOOD FRIDAY—	
The Surrender of the Soul	208
EASTER EVEN—	
After Death	214

FIRST WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Self.

ASH WEDNESDAY.

KEEPING UNDER THE BODY.

“Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now, they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we are incorruptible. I, therefore, so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body and bring it into subjection.”—*I. Cor. ix. 25-27.*

STANDING upon the threshold of another Lent, with an earnest desire to make the most of its sacred opportunities, we must to-day strike out some line of thought which we can follow through this holy tide. It ought to be one rich in spiritual suggestion, and full of practical helpfulness. Such a theme is suggested to us by St. Paul:—Striving for the Mastery; the mastery over self, over satan, over the world, over adversity, over sin, over suffering, over death. Let us try to set before ourselves this great theme in all its many-sidedness.

To-day let us consider the mastery which we need to gain over that lower part of ourselves

which the Bible speaks of as “the body” or “our flesh.”

St. Paul, drawing a vivid and forceful illustration from the Corinthian games, lets us into the secrets of his spiritual life, and gives us a glimpse of the methods by which his splendid character was matured. With possibly some pathetic allusion to the bodily weakness which they had despised and to that “thorn in the flesh” which so sorely troubled him, he reveals to his Corinthian converts the tactics of his spiritual warfare. “So fight I, not as one that beateth the air; but I keep under my body and bring it into subjection.” Grasp the force of these words. They mean, “It is no unreal contest in which I am engaged. It is a deadly conflict. I am face to face with my enemy. Every blow must be delivered directly at him with the most telling effect. I fight fiercely, desperately, doggedly. I strike, not at random, but with all my skill and with all my might. I crush my adversary with repeated heavy blows. I humble him and keep him low.” Such was the struggle which St. Paul assured his followers he was accustomed to carry on.

But who was his opponent in this hard-fought fight, the recipient of these deadly blows? None other than his own body, his flesh, the old Adam within him. This was the enemy against whom

he had to contend and whom he was determined to subdue. Here was a foe within his own borders against whom he must wage unceasing warfare. Here was a rebellious force which must be crushed and kept under close restraint, if he was to dwell in safety and possess his soul in peace.

To this same warfare we are called all our life long, and especially during this Lent. The body with its pleasures, its exacting requirements, its incessant demands, is the enemy of our higher life. "The flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other."¹ There is an irrepressible conflict between the two.

How is the body to be subdued? By scourgings, by severe asceticism, by punishing the body for the sins of the soul? Some of us have seen that great painting of The Flagellants, in which a multitude of young and old are pictured as lashing themselves fiercely to turn aside the wrath of God. Is it thus that our bodies must be subdued? Must we cut, and bruise, and starve our flesh into subjection to the soul? Which is right, the ascetic spirit of the past, or the easy living of to-day? Neither of them is wholly right, they are both perilous extremes. When St. Paul spoke of keeping under his body,

¹ Gal. v. 17.

he included in that expression all those claims originating from our existence in bodily form which war against the soul. Everything which is wisely adapted to overcome them ought to be used. There are some sins which only fasting and prayer can cast out.¹ There are some natures for whom severe bodily discipline is a necessity. For all of us the Church evidently considers some measure of abstinence from the gratification of the desires of our flesh as a most wholesome discipline. So long as we are in the body we shall not become spiritual by means wholly spiritual. We shall need a wise combination of discipline for the soul and body both. We must keep under the body while we educate the soul.

In this great conflict with our lower selves we have need of absolute sincerity. We must recognize our body, with all its strong animal appetites, its downward tendencies, its almost incorrigible selfishness, as an insidious and deadly enemy of our spiritual life. The deceitful lusts of the flesh which war against the soul are cruel and cunning foes. We must have no sham fighting, no beating of the air. The contest is a very real, a very anxious, a very momentous one. We cannot afford to deceive ourselves or to be deceived. We must be in

¹ St. Matt. xvii. 21.

dead earnest, must know exactly what we are about, and must make every blow tell. Has there been any unreality in our Christianity? Has our warfare against self been in the past somewhat feeble and faltering? Let us renew it to-day with a determination to fight as did St. Paul. Let us cast aside all secret tenderness for ourselves, and fight a good fight against the evil that is within us. Let us mercilessly buffet and mortify our fleshly lusts until we have brought them into complete subjection and gained the mastery over them.

FIRST WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Self.

THURSDAY.

GOVERNING THE MIND.

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . . with all thy mind.—*St. Mark xii. 30.*

HAVE we grasped this great necessity, that the mind as well as all other parts of our being must be given up to God? We have perhaps learned that “the body is for the Lord.” We have heard God calling out to us, “My son, give me thine heart.” But do we realize also that we must serve Him “with a willing mind”? Have we gained the mastery over our mind, and devoted it to the reasonable service of God?

It is not easy to do so nowadays. We live in a time of great intellectual freedom and activity. Everyone now claims the right to throw off all restraints, to think for himself, to form his own opinions, to explore the whole wide field of human thought. There is great danger in such

a state of affairs. The human mind, like the human body, shares in the infirmities of our fallen race. It is prone to curiosity, to conceit, to false confidence, to pride and vanity. It is liable to run into error at every step. It, no less than the body, needs to be chastened, restrained, governed, and subdued. Its excesses are more difficult to deal with than those of the body. The temptations which so easily beset it are more subtle and seductive. Self-discipline and self-restraint grow more difficult as we go up into the realm of mind. The sins of the intellect are not so gross, and open, and repulsive as those of the flesh. There is often a certain nobility about them, an air of distinction which goes far to palliate their wickedness. The world winks at them, apologizes for them, or openly approves of them. It has somehow come to be felt that the human mind is emancipated from all restraint, free to go its own way with or without God, less responsible to God than the body or the spirit of man.

This is a terrible mistake. The mind as well as the body is for the Lord. It is no more free from moral obligation than any other part of the nature of man. It is accountable to God for every moment of its activity, for every thought, for every tone and temper which it indulges in. We are as solemnly bound to

think right as to do right, to govern the mind as to subdue the body, to have a pure mind as to keep a clean heart. We cannot banish God from the domain of human thought. His rights there are sacred and must be maintained.

We are called, then, as Christians, to the mastery of the mind. We must claim it, subdue it, govern it, use it *for God*. Its insatiable curiosity, its restlessness, its self-confidence, its rashness and irreverence must be restrained. We must hold it responsible for the use of all the time given it by God for its activities. While we give it needful rest and relaxation, we must systematically train it and devote it to the service of God. To crowd it with the knowledge of this world, to busy it constantly with human affairs, to hold it down to the low level of worldly pursuits, to concentrate all its energies upon the accumulation of wealth or the activities of society, to exhaust it in these ways, is to defraud ourselves of all its truer, higher life. It is to debauch and squander one of the most precious gifts of God, to antagonize God and our better self. "To be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God,"¹ May God preserve us from a carnal mind.

¹ Romans viii. 6, 7.

The New Testament has a great deal to say about the government of the mind, and describes many sorts of minds. Every one of its vividly descriptive phrases will furnish food for devout meditation. It warns us against minds which are "feeble, shaken, doubtful, double, defiled, blinded, fleshly, evil affected, hardened in pride, despiteful, wicked, corrupt, reprobate." It loves to picture the beauty of a mind "sober, sound, steadfast, humble, lowly, willing, pure, spiritual, stayed on God." It exhorts us to "let this mind be in us which was in Christ Jesus."¹

Let us take to-day a few thoughts and work each of them out into a practical resolve.

1. I will try to keep my mind pure. I will guard it against idle gossip, against the shallow talk of society, against the loose light literature of the day, against all that may soil and stain the spotless purity which ought to be the constant condition of a Christian mind.

2. I will remember my responsibility to God for the use of my mind. I will take care that its occupations are such as God can approve. Its moods, its activities, and all its thoughts must be brought "into captivity to the obedience of Christ."² I will deliberately undertake to fill it with the knowledge of God, and to occupy it with worthy pursuits.

¹ Phil. ii. 5.

² II. Cor. x. 5.

3. Finally, I will *govern* my mind. It shall not run wild, ungoverned and unrestrained. I will hold it accountable to myself and to God continually. It shall obey me and do my will. It shall be under my control. I will master it and make it do my will. And I will often lift it up to God.

FIRST WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Self.

FRIDAY.

BRIDLING THE TONGUE.

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man’s religion is vain.”—*St. James i. 26.*

WE shall need but a moment’s thought to satisfy ourselves of the importance of bridling the tongue. Take all the words that have ever been spoken out of the mouth of man since the world began, weigh them well in a balance, and think how many of them might better have been left unsaid. How many of them are idle words, hollow words, sharp words, bitter words, blasphemous words, impure words? Must we not exclaim with the Psalmist, “Thou hast loved to speak all words that may do hurt, O thou false tongue.”¹ It is an awful thing to think of the myriads of words which have fallen from the tongues of men and to consider how

¹ Psalm lii. 5.

many of them have brought only grief and pain into the world. Verily, "the tongue is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." "So is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature, and it is set on fire of hell." ¹

If this language seems unduly strong, we must remember that sins of the tongue are always worse than they seem, because they betray the wrong that lurks in the heart. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." ² It is only the pure in heart who can see God. He who bringeth evil words out of an evil heart cannot see God, either in this world or in the world to come. Pure words out of a clean heart are like "apples of gold in pictures of silver." ³

Let us take a firm hold to-day upon this fundamental principle of the Christian life—if we are to be at peace with God and man, if we are to be at peace within ourselves, we must learn to rule the tongue. Christian people especially must do so. Good people, those who are leading what the world recognizes as godly lives, are in great danger at this very point. They may be free from some of the grosser sins of the tongue, but are they not often critical, censorious, uncharitable, busy about others' affairs,

¹ St. James iii. 8. 6. ² St. Matt. xii. 34. ³ Prov. xxv. 11.

careless in their speech? Do they not sometimes relax their restraint upon the tongue, and under the cover of intimate friendship or in moments of indignation permit themselves to speak words which may do harm? Are they always careful, conscientious, scrupulous as to what they say? They need to be especially watchful of themselves because their words have a double power for harm. The general uprightness of their lives makes a wrong or idle word from their lips doubly dangerous. The closer we walk with God, the more watchfully must we guard the door of our lips.

There is one vice of the tongue which every Christian ought to hate and shun. Talkativeness is one of the chief errors of our day and is a deadly foe of the spiritual life. No talkative person will ever attain to a high degree of sanctity. An unbridled tongue is "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison." One of the greatest masters of the spiritual life has given it as his judgment that "Talkativeness is the mother of sloth, the sign of ignorance and folly, the door of slander, the minister of lies, the destroyer of fervent devotion." We may add that it is the offspring of pride, for it is only those who think much of themselves and set a high value upon their own words who will have much to say.

There is one theme, however, upon which we might well talk more freely than we do, that is, about God and the things of God. There is little danger that we will talk too much of Him. The tongue is the best member that we have, because with it we can praise Him now and through eternity. Christians ought to talk more freely of the things which most concern their souls. "Come," said Archbishop Usher to his most familiar friend, "let us always say something about Christ before we part."

Speak then, O my tongue, less often of thy neighbour and thyself and more of God. And let all thy words be such as these:

Pure words out of a clean heart, free not only from all sin and shame, but free from worldliness and all that savours not of God.

True words, true in intention, true in appearance, true towards men, true towards God, true enough to stand the test of the great Judgment Day.

Kind words, such as our Saviour spoke in the days of His earthly ministry. They cost little and are worth much. They return upon us an hundred-fold and fill our life with sweetness and unfailing joy.

Helpful words, full of timely warning and encouragement, words of wise counsel in the time of need, strong words of righteousness and

truth sown broadcast in the wide world-field, of which God shall give the increase in His own good time. "A word spoken in due season, how good it is!"¹

Go forth, O my soul, and speak such words; kind and helpful, pure and true. Make it thy lifelong habit to bring them forth; let God teach thee and tell thee how; and rule thy tongue prudently with all thy power, remembering this, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."²

¹ Prov. xv. 23.

² St. James iii. 2.

FIRST WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Self.

SATURDAY.

THE SUBJUGATION OF THE WILL.

“Not my will, but Thine, be done.”—*St. Luke xxii. 42.*

OUT of the shadows of Gethsemane, out of a heart wrung with agony, from a tongue that spake as never man spake, these words were flung into the midst of a lost world. The Son of Man was working out that prayer which He had given as the Son of God, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” In the glory which He had with His Father before the world was,¹ there had been unbroken harmony of will, and now, hard as it was for His human nature to bear the strain, He held His human will in close conformity to the Divine. If one may reverently say so, it was the crisis in His human life, the fiercest assault of the powers of evil, the final triumph in the warfare of self

¹ St. John xvii. 5.

against God, the complete surrender of the lower to the higher self. In the garden of Gethsemane was consummated in will, if not in deed, the Eternal Sacrifice of Calvary.

That same battle must be fought in every human soul. When the flesh has been disciplined, when the mind has been devoted to the service of God, the study of His Word, and when that unruly member, the tongue, has been brought under control, when the outworks of the evil that is within us have been won, the citadel of the soul remains yet to be stormed. Man has a will, sovereign and uncontrolled. Until it has been subdued and surrendered to God, the victory is not won. This is the irrepressible conflict which each of us has to fight. Self-love and self-will are strong, and with most of us the struggle must be long and hard. But it must be fought and won, if we are to be true soldiers and servants of Christ. "Not everyone that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven." ¹

Let us realize clearly, then, what it is that we have to do. If we are to be true Christians, to live a Christlike life, we must subdue not only all the other powers of our body and soul, but also our will, to God. We cannot serve two

¹ St. Matthew vii. 21.

masters, God and self. If "Christ pleased not Himself," if He throughout His earthly life submitted Himself entirely to the will of His Father which was in heaven, we must try to do the same. This is the straight and narrow way to holiness and happiness. It was a favourite saying of St. Bernard: "Let there be an end of your own will, and there will be no such thing as hell. Master your own will, and you have at once removed that place, to which you would otherwise have been bound and where you would have been tormented, just as much as if hell itself were destroyed and its flames were extinguished." But St. Bernard only shows us one side of the truth. We shall never find perfect peace and happiness until we bring our rebellious human will into perfect harmony with the divine. Until then life will be full of anxiety, disappointment, conflict, and unrest, because we are "fighting against God." But from the day when we bring our will to the foot of the Cross and surrender it into the hands of God, from that day forth our eternal life, here and hereafter, will be full of peace and happiness. It will matter little what its events and vicissitudes may be. We are in the strong and loving hands of God, who doeth all things well. We have brought heaven down to earth.

How, then, is God's will to be done? Our

Lord Himself has told us—"Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Let us take this central petition of the Lord's Prayer as our intention for to-day and ask ourselves how God's will is done in heaven, so that we may translate the same methods of activity into our daily life.

First, it is done *promptly*. The angels never lag in the service of God. There is no questioning, no dallying, no making of excuses, they do instantly the will of God. To hear is to obey. The will of God is no sooner said than done. Delay or failure on their part would disorder the plans of God and wreck the universe.

Secondly, they do it *gladly*. We cannot imagine an angel going grudgingly, unwillingly, rebelliously to do God's will. We cannot think of them as desiring to do something else, shirking their work, hating to serve God. No, they are ready, anxious, glad to do whatever God wills, proud to do it. They are happy with an infinite joy in even the humblest ministry to human souls.

Finally, God's will is done *perfectly* in heaven. Every cup of loving service put into angel hands is filled "up to the brim." No task is unfulfilled, no duty left undone. All their work is made "perfect in the sight of the Lord."

Why cannot we do the will of God on earth as it is done in heaven? Why do we not once for all unite our will with God's will and be at peace? If we would only do so, if we would but follow the example of a godly life given us by the holy angels and by our Blessed Lord, we should at once enter into peace, that sweet peace of God which passeth all understanding and has infinite power to satisfy the human soul. Our hearts would soon become so closely knit to God, and our lives so entirely melted into his, that it would be impossible for us to go contrary to His holy will.

SECOND WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Temptation.

MONDAY.

THE TRIAL OF OUR FAITH.

“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations ; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.”—*St. James i. 2, 3.*

LET us meditate during this week upon the great mystery of temptation and try to learn how we are to gain the mastery over it.

What is temptation ? In the authorized version of the Bible the word generally means to test, to put on trial, to put to the proof. It is only occasionally that it means to solicit to evil. Temptation, in the Scriptural sense, is ordinarily a test of our virtue, a trial of our faith. It is anything which requires us to show of what metal we are made, to choose between right and wrong. It may arise from the circumstances in which we are placed, from the influences by which we are beset, or from our

own inner selves. But however it may originate, it is a test which will infallibly show what we are.

Temptation, then, is an important element in the discipline of human life. The constant necessity of choice, the responsibility of action, is a liberal education to the soul. It is the exercise by which moral muscle is developed and maintained. It is the probation under which we are placed and upon which hang the eternal issues of human life. God permits it to come upon us in order to "try our patience for the example of others, and that our faith may be found, in the day of the Lord, laudable, glorious, and honourable, to the increase of glory and endless felicity; or else to correct and amend in us whatsoever doth offend the eyes of our heavenly Father." If rightly received, "it shall turn to our profit and help us forward in the right way that leadeth unto everlasting life."¹

Temptation, therefore, is not only a needful but a blessed provision for our souls. Without it the highest type of character cannot be produced. There may be great purity of heart and genuine sanctity without much temptation. But the loftiest heights of human perfection cannot be reached, the finest and strongest types of character cannot be matured, without

¹ Office for the Visitation of the Sick.

severe trial of our faith. The man who has repeatedly met and conquered temptation, who has breasted all the world's storms, who has been victorious on a hundred fields of spiritual combat, is the truly great man. The woman, who out of the great deep of affliction has struggled bravely on and up to God, is nearest to Him in the end. The Beloved Disciple was nearer to his Lord as he toiled in the mines of Patmos than when in the inexperience of youth he would call down fire upon Samaria. The whole ordering of this world and of human life is such as to exercise the soul, to draw out its higher powers, and to build up its better self, if only the heart is right with God. To him who has any honest desire to do right it is a hard but blessed discipline adapted to educate and bring to perfection his whole better self. If we had no help to do right, if the chances were hopelessly against us, if God had put us into our present environment without giving us the power to refuse the evil and choose the good, we should have some ground for complaint. But such is not the case. Every soul has ample inducements to do good, has sufficient help from outside itself to turn every rock of offense into a stepping-stone on which it may mount up to God. If our eyes were only open to the spiritual world, we should see, as Elisha's timid

servant did, that they who are for us are more than they that be against us. ¹

We have the distinct assurance from Holy Writ, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." ²

Let us take to-day a firm grasp upon this great truth, that temptation is a necessary element in our spiritual life. "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried he shall receive the crown of life which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." ³

Temptation is not an unmixed evil, a stern and unwelcome necessity. It is a severe but wise and needful discipline for the purifying and strengthening of our souls. It gives us an opportunity to prove our love and faithfulness to God. It is the timber out of which all high character is to be built, the raw material from which we may weave the robe of righteousness. "Though now for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness, through manifold temptations," we ought greatly to rejoice "that the trial of our faith,

¹ II. Kings vi. 15, 17. ² I. Cor. x. 13.

³ St. James i. 12.

being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." †

† I. St. Peter i. 6, 7.

SECOND WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Temptation.

TUESDAY.

DOES GOD LEAD US INTO TEMPTATION ?

“Lead us not into temptation.”—*St. Matt. vi. 13.*

As we were thinking yesterday of the important part which temptation plays in the making of a Christian character, it may be that some of us asked ourselves, “Why then do we pray to be delivered from temptation? What did our Lord mean when He gave us that prayer?” It is a right and natural inquiry. We must try to answer it.

Does God ever lead us into temptation? Yes, He does. It is true He never seeks to draw us into sin, never incites us to evil. It is only devils and wicked men who do that. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man.”¹ But God leads men

¹ St. James i. 13.

into temptation, that is, he suffers them to be placed in positions where they will be put to the severest test. He tried the faith of Abraham when He bade him go up to Mt. Moriah and sacrifice his son. He led Balaam into temptation when he permitted him to go down into the land of Moab with the king's messengers. Our Blessed Lord was led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.¹

It is the same with us. God orders all our goings. His providence extends to the minutest details of our daily life. We are continually exercising our free will in the choice of alternatives and are at liberty to choose whom we will serve, but the opportunities of choice are all given us by God. We cannot make our own environment, though we can influence it somewhat. God places us day by day in certain circumstances, He leads us through certain courses of life, which are perfectly adapted to test and discipline each of us and determine what our future is to be. He suffers us to be constantly placed in positions where we are severely tried, in order that we may be educated up to a high standard of Christian character. Life is a training-school in which every experience is divinely planned to teach and strengthen us, if rightly met and used. He who leads us into it has pro-

¹ St. Matt. iv. I.

vided a way out of it, has given us the strength to master it.

Yes, God leads us into temptation, but He is ready to *lead us out of it*, to deliver us from the evil. If we were left to ourselves, we should be continually running into danger. There are perils on every hand, though we are too much blinded by the glare and glamour of this world to see them all. Only God and the angels know how near and threatening they are. We lay our plans, and mark out our course in life, and set our hearts upon the pleasures and prizes of this world. We pursue them, we strive after them, but often we do not get them. What we call a cruel fate thwarts our best laid plans, defeats our purposes, snatches the prizes of life out of our very grasp. Then we grieve and murmur, and perhaps rebel against God and curse Him. But we make an awful mistake in doing so. The things we desired were not best for us, they were full of peril for our souls, they would perhaps have dragged us down to ruin. God in His good providence was leading us out of temptation, turning us aside from the way of destruction, snatching us from the brink of the precipice. How often He has to do that! And how ungrateful we are, how slow to recognize the hand of our good God which has rescued us! If we could only see things as they are, we

should realize that most of the disappointments and denials which we have to bear are but blessings in disguise, merciful deliverances from perils into which we were determined to rush.

This, then, is what we mean when we pray, "Lead us not into temptation":—Lead us on through life, not in the way which we would choose, a way beset with temptation and danger at every step, but guide our feet into the way of peace; deliver us from the evil into which we would plunge if left to ourselves; lead us in the paths of righteousness for Thy Name's sake; turn our steps aside from every pitfall which satan has dug for them; suffer us not to rush on in rash self-confidence, but restrain and guide us, lest we dash our foot against a stone or sudden destruction come upon us unawares.

Let us, then, appropriate to ourselves the words of one of our sweetest hymns, in which all this is most beautifully expressed:

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home,

Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet! I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me.

“ I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on ;
I loved to choose and see my path ; but now
Lead Thou me on !
I loved the garish day ; and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will ; remember not past years.

“ So long Thy power has blest me, sure it still
Will lead me on,
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone ;
And with the morn those angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since and lost awhile.”

In this humble and chastened spirit let us pray very earnestly to God not to lead us into temptation and to prevent us from leading other souls astray.

SECOND WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Temptation.

WEDNESDAY.

IS IT A SIN TO BE TEMPTED ?

“My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation.”—*Ecclesiastes ii. 1.*

Is it a sin to be tempted ? Does not the presence of temptation indicate that there is something wrong within us ? When the old familiar temptations keep knocking at the door of our heart, is it not our fault ? If we were living thoroughly Christian lives, would we not be free from the temptations which now so easily beset us ? No doubt we have all questioned thus in the honest sincerity of our hearts, fearing lest some fault or weakness of our own is responsible for the number and severity of the temptations which confront us day by day. Of course, the temptations which are sent by God for the trial of our faith do not imply that we have fallen into sin. But do the persuasions of satan to

evil prove that our hearts are not right with God?

When such questionings arise we need to be reminded that temptation is the lot of man. No human soul has ever escaped it. None ever will. No degree of sanctity can ever lift us out of its reach. The greatest saint has to meet it as well as the least. The holiest lives have been beset by the most terrible temptations. Men are continually falling from high places into bottomless depths of guilt and despair. No contrivance of man, no retirement from the world, can remove us out of the great tempter's reach. A long life of holiness will not drive satan from the door of the heart. He may find entrance even at the last. The eternal Son of God in all His spotless purity "was tempted in all points like as we are." Surely satan, who dared assail Him, will never fear nor fail to attack us. Most of his temptations come to us whether we will or no. They are guests who come unbidden to the door of our hearts and clamor to be let in. If we reject them, they will not therefore cease to come. So long as life lasts we shall never get beyond their reach. They form a part of the life-long discipline by which in God's good providence our souls are to be tried and trained. Let us comfort ourselves with this thought.

But at the same time we must remember that, while we are not answerable for their coming, we are responsible if they stay. The great question is not whether we are visited by temptation, but whether we welcome it, entertain it, make it at home in our hearts. It is no sin to be tempted, else were our Lord the chief of sinners. But it is a deadly sin to dally with temptation, to trifle with it, to let it find a lodging in our minds. Our safety and our spiritual health depend upon our promptness and firmness in keeping it out of doors. There is a deep significance in what is told us of our great High Priest, "He was in all points tempted like as we are, *yet without sin.*"¹

Our Lord's temptation teaches us not to be too much troubled because we are beset by invitations to sin, but it brings another lesson which it is no less important for us to learn. Every effort to build up our spiritual life will be met by an attempt of the powers of evil to tear it down. Satan's intelligence is keen. He need not trouble himself about those who are not trying to do right. But the moment a human soul rouses itself to serve God, enters upon the pursuit of holiness, or attempts to reconsecrate its energies, he awakens into violent activity. He becomes alarmed lest it should

¹ Hebrews iv. 15.

succeed, and brings every artifice to bear to thwart its plans. He fights desperately, if need be. He besieges that soul with temptations such as it never dreamed of before. He tries to leave no place for God in all its thoughts. He flatters, he cajoles, he threatens it. Sometimes he feigns defeat, only to prepare the way for a more desperate attack upon some unguarded point. But so long as this life lasts, he will never abandon the hope of victory.

It was exactly so with our Blessed Lord. We hear nothing of satan until He reached the threshold of His ministry. Then it was, while He was gathering together all His powers for the great work which He had come to do, that satan met Him. Not in the ordinary courses of life, but in the sacred seclusion where He sought to be alone with the Father, in the very Holy of Holies of His human life, satan sought Him.

It will be so with us. Every effort to draw nigh to God will awaken satan to renewed activity. Every season of grace will bring him to our side. Every reconsecration of ourselves to the service of God will subject us to a renewed attack. We must expect it, we must prepare for it, we must not be taken off our guard. A fierce attack of temptation generally means, not that our spiritual life is dying out, but that

it is burning brighter and that satan is alarmed. A wise and experienced Christian is not surprised when his efforts to do right involve him in renewed temptations to do wrong, when his attempt to keep a holy [Lent provokes a new and violent attack of the enemies who lie in wait for his soul. He knew beforehand that it would be so. He goes serenely on his way, watchful but undismayed, and puts his whole trust in God.

“CHRISTIAN! dost thou see them

On the holy ground,
How the powers of darkness
Rage thy steps around?
Christian! up and smite them,
Counting gain but loss;
In the strength that cometh
By the holy Cross.

Christian! dost thou feel them,
How they work within,
Striving, tempting, luring,
Goading into sin?
Christian! never tremble;
Never be downcast;
Gird thee for the battle,
Watch and pray and fast.”

SECOND WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Temptation

THURSDAY.

TEMPTATION TO DISTRUST GOD.

“If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.”—*St. Matthew iv. 3.*

LET us meditate during the remaining days of this week upon the temptations of our Lord in the wilderness and try to learn what they teach. Although He was the Son of God, He was at the same time the Son of Man. The temptations of satan appealed to His human nature, they were intensely human, “such as are common to man,” exactly such as we have to meet and overcome. They were the very temptations with which satan is plying us this Lent.

The first was to distrust God. At the close of His long fast Jesus “was an hungered.” Thus far, no doubt, He had been in a spiritual ecstasy, so absorbed in communion with His Father that the wants of His body were suspended for the time. But now at last the sharp

pangs of hunger begin to make themselves felt. Satan sees his opportunity. Pointing to the stones of the desert, he exclaims: "If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread." His meaning is, "God has upheld you thus far, but now He has forsaken you. He has left you alone here in hunger and thirst. Give me some proof of divine power, or I shall not believe that you are His Son. If you are indeed His Son, you are as mighty and as full of resource as He. You have no need to wait for Him to satisfy your wants. You are quite equal to the emergency. Command that these stones be made bread, and your hunger will instantly be satisfied."

It was a temptation to distrust the good providence of His Father and work a miracle before His time. But our Blessed Lord was not to be seduced into such an act of self-will. He had come, not to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. Until His Father was ready to satisfy His hunger, He would wait. However great the suffering might be, He had an inner source of strength. His soul was feeding on the Word of God and the needs of His body sank into insignificance. As the Son of Man He knew the Hebrew Scriptures thoroughly. From out their familiar pages He chose the words with which to make reply.

He answered and said: "It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God." ¹ That is, "There is a higher and more precious life than that of the flesh. The soul does not live by bread alone. It will live, though the body die. It feeds upon the truth and love and life of God. It finds in them such satisfaction that the vulgar needs of the body are ignored. God is feeding my soul here in the wilderness, and that spiritual food is my meat and drink. I leave it to Him to satisfy the baser needs of my flesh." Thus did our Lord meet the temptation to distrust the divine providence and to exalt Himself.

Is satan whispering that same temptation in our ears this Lent? God has set before us this holy season as a time for retirement from the world, for mortifying the appetites of the body, and attending to the wants of the soul. Does satan tell you there is no need for that? Does he assure you that one part of the year is exactly the same as another and none more holy than the rest? Does he suggest that you are not self-indulgent, that you have a hard enough life as it is, that you are already keeping Lent all the year round, that you need no Lenten discipline, no self-imposed rules? Does he try to fill your

¹ St. Matthew iv. 4; Deut. viii. 3.

mind with business, with the cares of social and family life, until there is little or no room left for thoughts of God and the life of the soul? He will do so, if he can. You may be sure he is cunningly and cruelly manipulating all his forces so as to crush out and kill all the higher life of your soul. Be on your guard. Resist him to his face. Say to him, "It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceedeth out of the mouth of God." "*I will not be blinded* to the life I am living. It is a high and holy thing. The physical life which I live is *only a part* of my real life. The bread which perisheth can nourish only that lower part of myself. It cannot feed my soul. It cannot sustain my true, my higher life. I will not neglect my better self. I must care for it first and let the needs of the body come afterwards. I must seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto me.¹ I will trust the good providence of my God. I will not neglect and starve my soul in order that I may take thought what I shall eat, or what I shall drink, or wherewithal I shall be clothed. I will use this holy season to nourish and develop my spiritual powers. I will feed upon the Word of God."

¹ St. Matt. vi. 33.

Here is our great lesson for to-day. When we are filled with pity at the wants of men, and cry out in distress, "Whence shall we buy bread that these may eat?"—when the sense of our own needs is strong, and we see not how they are to be satisfied, then comes the assurance of a Living Bread.

It is our tempted and victorious Lord Himself who tells us, "I am the bread of life; he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." "And the bread which I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."¹

Lord, evermore give us this Bread.

¹ St. John vi. 35, 51.

SECOND WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Temptation.

FRIDAY.

PRESUMPTION AND FALSE CONFIDENCE.

“If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down.”—*St. Matt. iv. 6.*

WHEN we have met and mastered the first of satan's temptations it may be that he will present to us a second, as he did to our Lord. Having found that Jesus could not be induced to distrust the providence of God, he attempted to make him presume too much upon it. By the exercise of supernatural powers of motion, he conveyed our Lord into the Holy City and set Him “on a pinnacle of the temple,” a portico overlooking the brook Kedron, at a height so great that the eye could hardly penetrate to the bottom of the abyss. He dared Him, as a proof of His divinity, to cast Himself down, assuring Him in the words of Holy Scripture that, if He were indeed the Son of God, the angels would bear Him up. It was a bold and cunning

attempt, but (like the first) it was promptly and crushingly met by our Lord. His reply is deeply significant. "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."¹

Is it possible, then, for us to tempt God? Here is an important question for us all. If we search the Scriptures, we shall find that they speak frequently of man as "tempting God." The Children of Israel tempted Him in the wilderness, when by their repeated rebellion they tried His patience and provoked His wrath. The Scribes and Pharisees by their foolish and unlearned questions often tempted Christ. It must be true, then, that man can tempt God. But how? Surely not by enticing Him to do wrong? St. James has solemnly assured us that "God cannot be tempted of evil."² How then? By putting Him needlessly to the test to see what He will do, by presumptuously trying His providence to see how far it will go, by thrusting ourselves into danger where we "have no power of ourselves to help ourselves," by perversely going contrary to His will. In these and other like ways we may tempt God, try His patience, and forfeit the right to expect His help. It is only when we are about His business, doing His will, that His angels will bear us up. It is a false confidence which leads us

¹ St. Matt. iv. 7.

² St. James, i. 13.

to reject God and at the same time depend upon His help to save us in every time of need. Here is the secret of most of our falls into sin. We rashly and wilfully go our own way and expect the good hand of our God to bear us up. We try experiments with God, seek safety or happiness by unlawful ways, put ourselves in peril needlessly, and, when destruction rushes upon us, expect God to interfere and save us by a miracle. We need to remember that it is written, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

This second temptation of our Lord is one with which we shall have to wrestle this Lent. Satan will try to make us satisfied with our spiritual life as it is. He will tell us that we are living very well before the eyes of men and do not need to make any especial efforts after holiness. He will whisper that God is loving and merciful, and that even if we should rebel against Him now, somehow He will bring peace at the last. "Cast thyself down," he says, "down into the depths of carelessness and false confidence. Be not afraid. The angels will bear thee up. If thou art the child of God, he has given them charge concerning thee. They will not suffer thy soul to be lost."

It is a dreadful delusion which he would practice upon us. He wishes to make us think that

this Lent has no duties for us. "It may be needful for others," he says, "but *you* do not need it." Let us not be deceived. We do need this Lent. We need to fast, and pray, and humble ourselves in the sight of God. We need every help which Christ and His Church can give. This Lent is a time of trial to us. We must either go backward or forward. Which will it be? When Easter comes, where will it find us, asleep under the flattery of satan, or watching by the Cross of Christ?

The place which satan chose for the second temptation of our Lord was the most sacred spot on earth, His Father's House. It was "a pinnacle of the Temple," a vast and dizzy height, a gallery of such splendid workmanship as made it one of the most magnificent things under the sun. Standing there at the threshold of His ministry, His human heart must have swelled with love for that holy place and with solemn consciousness of the mighty powers which slept within Him. He might well wish to put them to the proof at once.

It is often so with us. Satan comes to us as we stand upon the high places of human life, the dizzy heights of greatness in the Church or in the world, and bids us cast ourselves down. Every human dignity is a place of peril to the soul, for the great tempter stands by its side. "God's

manner is, when He meaneth to exalt a man, He will first humble him and make him low. The devil's manner is, we see, clean contrary; to lift them up to the *clouds*, that He may bring them down to the grave, yea, to the *lowest grave*. He carrieth them the higher to throw them down with the greater violence." So said old Bishop Andrewes, and our own experience proves the truth of it. Even the spiritual elevation which we gain in a well-kept Lent may tempt us to pride and self-confidence. Let us, therefore, "be not high-minded, but fear."

SECOND WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Temptation.

SATURDAY.

DOING EVIL THAT GOOD MAY COME.

“All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”—*St. Matt. iv. 9.*

THE final temptation which satan presented to our Lord was even bolder than the rest. It was that by a single act of homage to himself He should hasten the appointed course of events and win the whole world with one stroke. Exhibiting to Him “all the kingdoms of this world and the glory of them,” he said to our Lord in effect: “I am the prince of this world; these kingdoms are now mine. You hope to gain them. But how? If you are to wrest them from my grasp, you have no easy task. It will take time and toil and suffering, and you will win only a partial conquest in the end. But all that is needless. We are here alone. Make one moment’s act of homage

to me, accept them from my hand, and you shall have them now, you shall have them all. There is no need of shame and suffering. All that you desire is in your grasp to-day."

Ah, but *was* there no need? The word which God had spoken through His holy prophets since the world began, could He let it go unfulfilled? The work which His Father had given Him to do, should He do it in any other than the Father's way? The love and loyalty which belong to God alone, could they be given to His enemy? The worship due only to Almighty God, should it be given to a fallen creature of His Hand? No. To do as He was bid would be to stultify Himself, to act a lie, to violate the eternal realities which He disclosed when He affirmed, "I and my Father are one." ¹

What if our Lord had yielded then? What if the thought of His Cross and passion, and the vision of Calvary had overcome Him there? But He could not yield and be Himself. Firm as the mountain rock on which He stood were His love and loyalty to God and man. Clearly rang out His voice through the mountain air: "Get thee hence, satan; for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve." ² Baffled and beaten in

¹ St. John x. 30.

² St. Matt. iv. 10.

every attempt, satan fled away and left our Lord alone. His power was broken, mankind was freed from slavery, the first great victory of the Son of Man was won.

The same temptation often comes to us, the temptation to take a wrong road to a right end, to weary of God's way and strike out a short cut for ourselves, to go our own way rather than God's way. It is a subtle temptation and is assisted by the weakness of our flesh. The paths of righteousness often seem to us very long and roundabout, while the ways of sin look *so easy* and *so short*. The tired soul faints and falters and wonders if it shall ever reach the end and be safe home at last. Then satan steals softly to our side, shows how steep and thorny God's way is, how hard it is to live a long life of virtue and self-denial and self-restraint. He brings up in long array all the trials of patience and faith and love, the struggles against human weakness and passion and appetite. He sets them all before us and says, "It is too much. You can never endure it to the end. God has given you too hard a task. You will only have a long life of anxiety and unrest and be found wanting at the last. God has been hard with you, I will be easier. Why should you consume your life in a hopeless struggle after perfection. Why not give it up at once and come down to

the standard of the world? Then the way shall be made short and plain. Then you shall have ease, and pleasure, and relief from care. Cast to the winds all your high notions, and come and live as others do. Come and be at rest. Bow down and worship me, the Prince of this World."

How many have hearkened to that voice! How many an earnest soul has grown weary in well doing, taken a look forward at the steepness of the way, and lain down at satan's feet! Let it not be so with any of us. It is a vain and delusive hope which satan holds out to you. He *cannot* give you rest. This world cannot satisfy you. Your soul craves something higher than they have to give. St. Augustine spoke for us all when he cried out, "Thou, O God, hast made us for thyself, and our heart is restless, until it find rest in thee." There is a true and tender voice which says, "Come unto Me, all ye that are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." The soul of man thirsts for the living God and hungers for the Bread of Life. God alone can satisfy its desires. "It is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."† To the faithful soul His worship is sweet beyond all understanding and His service is perfect free-

† St. Matt. iv. 10; Deut. x. 20.

dom. It grows in peace and blessedness as life wears on. It "brighteneth ever more and more unto the perfect day." It is to this blessed service that the Church calls us this Lent. She bids us, resisting and mastering all the temptations of satan, go forward in the Royal Way of the Holy Cross, follow our Lord in the paths of righteousness, learning the rich lessons which He waits to teach, and growing day by day in love and loyalty to Him who is at once our human brother and our God.

THIRD WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over the World.

MONDAY.

IS THE WORLD OUR FRIEND OR OUR ENEMY?

“ Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.”—*St. James iv. 4.*

LET our meditation this week be upon the Christian's relation to the world.

What do we mean by “ the world? ” What did our Blessed Lord mean by that phrase which was so often on His lips? He meant not simply this created universe in which we live; He did not mean the whole human race; He did not confine His meaning to the wicked followers of satan, the Prince of this World; and yet He meant something very real, very powerful, very dangerous. He had in mind the great worldly world, which lives for itself, practically ignores God, sets up its own standards of right and wrong, and attempts to dominate all human

life and to enslave every soul of man. Such was His meaning when, on the eve of His passion, He rejoiced in spirit, foresaw His victories over the Cross and the tomb, and bid His disciples "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."¹

Must we, like our Lord, "overcome the world?" Yes. The world is our enemy.

1. There is much evil in the world. Many of its most cherished customs, much of its philosophy, most of its standards of right and wrong, a great deal of its life, are wrong in the sight of God. While hardly anything in the world is utterly bad, hardly anything is wholly good. Evil is present everywhere. As Christians we must not blind ourselves to it, must resist it, must overcome it. We cannot be neutral in the warfare between good and evil which is ever going on. So far as the world is evil, we must be at enmity with the world, if we would be friends of God.

2. But this is not all. We are forced into a position of antagonism, not only to the evil which is in the world, but to the world itself. It is attractive, seductive, absorbing, exacting. It wants the whole heart and life of man. It claims all his time and thought and care for itself. It demands his all. It does not recog-

¹ St. John xv. 33.

nize any other world or any higher life. It has its own standards of morality, its own philosophy of life, its own way of looking at things. It cannot see beyond its own horizon, nor does it acknowledge that there is any "beyond." It is quite sufficient unto itself.

To all this the Christian cannot submit. He takes a wider, loftier view. He is a citizen of two worlds—the seen and the unseen. He is *in* this world but not *of* it. He has learned how short, how uncertain, how unsatisfying the world's life is at the best. He has found out that "the hope of the ungodly is like thistle-down that is blown away with the wind, like a thin froth that is driven away with the storm, like as the smoke which is dispersed here and there with a tempest, and passeth away as the remembrance of a guest that tarrieth but a day." ¹ The great realities of life are not material but spiritual. The things which shall endure are not those of the visible but of the invisible world. Human life is greater, grander than the world acknowledges it to be. To adopt the standards of this world, to live as though it were all, to confess its claims, would be for a Christian not only the height of absurdity but treason against God. Living for this world has been called "The Great

¹ Wisdom v. 14.

Insanity." It is an insane thing for one who has eternity before him to act as if his span of life were at the utmost only three score years and ten. It is worse than insanity for one who has countless treasures from God given him in trust for himself and those who come after him, to let them all go and be lost in order that he may grasp a few gilded trinkets just for to-day. If we did not see it done every day, we should consider it absurd and impossible that those who "profess and call themselves Christians," should act for one moment as though this world were all. And yet so great are the fascinations of this world, such power has it to blind the eyes and harden the heart, that out of all mankind there have been but few who have learned to estimate it at its real worth and to live the larger life, only a few whose plans and hopes and fears are not centered in this world. And even those few are sometimes very faint and faltering in their resistance to its claims, and it requires all the severe but loving discipline which God knows how to give to wean them from the world.

Let us then face this question to-day: Are we friends of the world or of God? There is enmity between the two, and we must make our choice. "Ye cannot serve God and mam-

mon.”¹ If we are to be friends of God, we must overcome the world, must resist its seductions, must refuse to be dazzled by its glamour, must use it as not abusing it, must master it and not let it master us. Let us squarely face the issue. Worldliness is opposed to godliness. The worldly world is our enemy. It will blind us, drag us down, and ruin us, if possible. Its gross and carnal views of life are a deadly miasma which will poison and kill our souls. Its smiles are full of danger and deceit. Its friendship and its prizes cannot satisfy our souls. “All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof; but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.”²

¹ St. Matt. vi. 24.

² I. St. John ii. 16, 17.

THIRD WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over the World.

TUESDAY.

OVERCOMING THE EVIL THAT IS IN THE WORLD.

“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”—
Rom. xii. 21.

WE agreed yesterday that there is a vast mass of evil in the world which must be overcome. The one great, evident, awful fact about the world's life is that it is full of sin. The great world-religions ignore this side of human life, and provide nothing which can wash out the “damned spot” of sin from the hands and hearts of man. It is only Christianity which undertakes the gigantic task of baptizing in the waters of life a world that is “dead in trespasses and sins.” It alone is based upon a recognition of the extent, the variety, the tenacity, the horror of human sin. It, unlike them all, has a God who is of “purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look upon iniquity.”¹ It regards sin

¹ Habakkuk i. 13.

as a subtle, powerful, living antagonist, to be subdued and slain. Just as once "there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the great dragon," so now there is war on earth between the followers of Christ and "that old serpent, called the devil, and satan, which deceiveth the whole world." †

But how is this warfare to be carried on, and by what means is the victory to be gained. Shall we overcome the evil in the world by fiercely attacking it, by fighting doggedly and desperately against it, by violently uprooting it, by driving it out of the world and forcing it home to hell?

Yes and no. Let us learn a lesson here from our Lord. One of the chief purposes for which He came into this world as man was that He might overcome the evil that was in it. How did He proceed? Did He begin at once a fierce crusade against all the evil powers of the world? Did He attack evil wherever it showed its head? Did He bring to bear His supernatural powers to annihilate it and banish it from the world? No. He rebuked some of its grosser and more awful forms when He came face to face with them. He warned mankind of the results of sin. But He did not undertake to cast out the devils all at once. What He did was this. He

† Rev. xii. 7-9.

lived a quiet, hidden life of spotless purity, free from all taint of sin, without even the slightest appearance of evil—a perfect life. And that was all. He simply set in the midst of this evil world a holy life, and left it to do its work. And yet He said, “I have overcome the world.” He knew that the good which He had brought into the world would overcome the evil. He said with confidence, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me.”¹

Here, then, we have our Divine Ensample of the way in which we are to overcome the evil in the world; not by forcibly emptying the world of evil, but by quietly filling it with good. Our work is not so much negative as positive, not so much destructive as constructive. What we have to do is not so much to batter down the evil as to build up the good.

This is true both of the Christian Church as a whole and of every individual member of the same.

1. It is true of the Church. She must work as God works. She must be patient, wise, and confident in her strength. Her chief work is, not to uproot the rank weeds of evil, but to plant and water the seeds of good. She is not bound at once to reform every abuse, right every wrong, and banish all evil from the world. She

¹ St. John xii. 32.

must not "strive, nor cry, nor lift up her voice in the streets," in noisy resistance to her enemies. Her mightiest works, like those of God in nature, will be done in silence and secrecy. Her most splendid victories will be wrought by the weapons of faith and prayer and suffering by the quiet multiplication of good until evil is overcome.

2. It is so with every soul. If we should drive out the evil and leave our spiritual house swept and garnished, but empty, our last state would be worse than the first. We should soon have seven devils instead of one. Our only safety lies in the multiplication of the good that is in us until the evil is permanently crowded out. Many an earnest Christian rouses himself as Lent comes round for a desperate struggle against his besetting sins, concentrates all his energies upon them, and fights them manfully. This is well, but it is not all he has to do. His Lent must have its positive side. He must not only break off bad habits, he must build up good ones in their place. He must not only mortify his flesh, he must feed his soul upon the Word of God. He must not only forsake satan, he must "draw nigh to God." He ought not to dissipate his energies in violent combat when it would have been wiser to expend them in providing food and nourishment for his soul. There

is a judicious economy in Christian living whose maxim is not, "Drive out the evil," but "Bring in the good." Genuine moral goodness is the only power which can overcome evil. The swiftest and surest way to banish the powers of evil from the heart is to reinforce and fortify the powers of good until they are strong enough to win for themselves a decisive victory.

Let us, then, labor quietly but very diligently to fill our own lives, our community, our Church, and the world (so far as we can) with pure and positive goodness, and leave the results to God. When evil confronts us, let us resist it bravely with such weapons as God gives. But let our chief reliance be placed in the grace of God which will enable us to "overcome evil with good."

THIRD WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over the World.

WEDNESDAY.

OVERCOMING THE WORLD BY FAITH.

"This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—*I. St. John v. 4.*

DURING the remainder of this week let us study how the fascinations of this world are to be overcome, how the heart of man may be lifted up out of the visible into the invisible world.

This beautiful world, which has so much to charm the eye, to occupy the mind, to delight the heart, so much in it that is good along with the evil, tempts mankind upon its good as well as on its evil side. The good that is in the world is almost as dangerous as the evil is. The innocent enjoyments of human life, the pleasures of society, the engrossing activities of the business world, human friendship and family ties, all that

attracts and delights us here below, all these have their dangers for the soul. We are permitted by God to have them, to enjoy them. But they are not all; they are only foretastes of what God has in store for us. They are like the object lessons of a kindergarten school, to educate us to live a larger life, to fit us for a higher sphere. We must not grow too much attached to them, must not cling to them too long, must recognize them as only a means to an end. We must not be like men and women who insist on lingering in the kindergarten under the impression that it is real life. We must realize the littleness, the transitoriness, the unreality of this life considered simply in itself, and grasp the great fact that "the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." ¹

We must learn to "set our affections on things above, not on things on the earth." ² We must be emancipated from all low, and narrow, and merely worldly views of human life.

Now, how is this to be done? It can only be by getting the eyes wide open to spiritual things, by getting a firm grasp of eternal truths, by gaining motives which will exalt, and dignify, and enlarge our life out of worldliness into other worldliness. There is but one thing that can do

¹ II. Cor. iv. 18.

² Col. iii. 2.

this, namely, the Christian Faith. Grasp that, receive it into your mind, hold it in your heart, work it out in your life, and you have overcome the world. You have introduced into your life principles which will make it unworldly. You have by one blow broken the bonds of worldliness and emancipated your soul. Every one who has truly held the Christian Faith has overcome the world. That faith is an active principle which elevates and ennobles human life, and deals the death blow to all that is of the earth earthy. It is slowly, but surely, transforming the world. It sets up this triumphant claim, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof." ¹

Thus it consecrates and hallows this world and all that is in it, and converts them to sacred and unearthly uses.

This was true even of the rudimentary and imperfect faith of God's people under the Old Covenant. Read the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews and see how it "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens," and won countless victories over the world, and then tell me

¹ 1. Cor. x. 26.

if the Christian Faith must not do all this and more. Tell me if it hath not power to wean man from the world, to satisfy and save his soul.

The victory of our faith over the world is sure and it is swift. When once that faith is grasped, the victory is won. Let the eternal realities dawn upon the soul, let the life become hid with Christ in God; "only believe," and you have shattered the world's weapons with one blow. Take unto you the strong and well-rounded, and brightly polished shield of the Christian Faith, and your victory is assured, it is already won. The Christian armour is not out of date. The weapons of the spiritual warfare have not changed. The shield of faith, which all the triumphant saints of God have used, will protect us and save us as it did them. The dint of past conflict which it bears only assures us of its power to repel our present foes. It will quench all the glittering fascinations of the world, and be found proof against them at every point. Behind it the Christian is in another world. He "endures, as seeing Him who is invisible." However fiercely the battle rages round, he is calm and undismayed. Amidst its din and noise he is at peace, for his soul is stayed upon God, and he does not fear what man can do unto him. "He will not be afraid of any evil tidings, for

his heart standeth fast and believeth in the Lord." †

Here, then, is the divine method of overcoming the world. In so far as we follow it we shall come off conquerors, and more than conquerors in the end. The reason why we do not gain an immediate victory is because of the littleness of our faith. We need to go back to apostolic times and learn from holy men of old how to hold the Christian Faith in all its purity and power. Let us resolve to-day to strive for a reasonable, a religious, a *living* faith. Let us be satisfied with nothing short of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Faith firmly grasped, implicitly believed, and held as our most precious heritage, and then the creeds of the Church will become our songs of victory.

† Psalm cxii. 7.

THIRD WEEK IN LENT.

Mastery Over the World.

THURSDAY.

NONCONFORMITY TO THE WORLD.

“Be not conformed to this world.”—*Romans xii. 2.*

CLOSELY akin to our meditation of yesterday is that which we are to make to-day.

When we were baptized we made a solemn vow and covenant with God that we would renounce the world. We did not mean that henceforth we would have nothing to do with the world. We meant that we would renounce its authority, and repudiate its claim to rule in our hearts and lives. We meant that we would live, not according to the standards of the world, but according to the ensample of a godly life given us by our Blessed Lord.

We did not renounce the beautiful in nature and art. God means us to love and enjoy all that is beautiful, in so far as it is good and true. The natural world is a great “pictorial Bible” in which, no less than in God’s written Word, is

revealed the mind of Christ. "The invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and God-head."¹

If only we have eyes to see, the material universe can teach us much about God and His workings in the world. Likewise human art, if it is fine and high, being inspired by the Holy Ghost, is not to be renounced.

We did not renounce the love of humanity. God wills us to love our fellowmen—to think highly of man as man. Mankind is made in the image of the Most High God, redeemed by the eternal sacrifice of Christ, ordained to the most glorious destiny. Even in his degradation and his deepest sin, he is not to be renounced. We are bound, as the children of God, to have a warm, true love of humanity.

What then did we renounce? The sovereignty of this world. We determined that the powers of this world should not govern us. We affirmed that we are "citizens of a better country, that is, an heavenly."

The world is very lordly in its demands for our allegiance. It has set up its own standards of life to which it expects us to conform. It has but scant courtesy for any principles of

¹ Romans i. 20.

human conduct but its own. It smiles, sneers, scoffs at any one who violates its rules of policy. It regards any deviation from its customs as something like insanity. It claims the right to direct and dominate the whole life of man.

The influence of the world is a very subtle and pervasive thing. The great city of London generates an atmosphere of its own. It fills the air with fog and smoke and dust, so that the atmosphere of London is almost as different from that of the woods and fields as darkness is from light. It permeates everything and colors the whole life of the metropolis. Just so "the world" creates an atmosphere of its own which enshrouds and colors all human life. We breathe it in with every breath. It creeps like a miasma into the soul. It has marvelous power to blind the eyes, and clog the mind, and color all our thoughts of God. Occasionally men rise above it and catch a glimpse of the clear sky of truth, and see the great lights which God has kindled there. But for the most part their whole life is seen through this hazy atmosphere of worldliness.

Let us notice some of its characteristics:

1. It clings close to earth. There is nothing elevating about it. It is of the earth earthy. It cannot rise above the lower levels of life and conduct.

2. It forms a low estimate of human life, makes it only a thing of to-day, robs it of its highest dignity, and leaves it no longer *life*, an existence and nothing more.

3. It hides God from human eyes, belittles Him, distorts His splendid qualities, dwindles Him into a cold abstraction, a "deity," an impersonal "force that makes for righteousness."

4. It deceives the spiritual sight, magnifies the things of this world out of their true proportion, and exaggerates their real worth.

As Christians we cannot conform to this worldly world, we must not be misled by it. Our views of life are to be got not from it, but from God. Our religious principles are higher than its rules of policy. Our Rock is not as its rock. Our ways are not as its ways. We live in a different atmosphere, one created for us by the Christian Church, a purer, healthier, brighter environment. We are governed by higher motives; we take larger views of life; we cannot always bow to public opinion; we must often appeal from the low and hasty judgment of the world to the just judgment of that Great Day when God shall be all in all. Unless such is our attitude towards the world, we are Christians only in name. If we are Christians indeed and in truth, we have deliberately, definitely, and decisively resolved within

ourselves that we are not to be conformed to the groveling standards of "the world," but governed by the eternal principles of the Gospel of God; we have renounced the world as our ruler and our judge, and henceforth will cleave only unto God.

Let us deepen within us to-day the sense of our separation from the world, and reconsecrate our whole self to God.

THIRD WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over the World.

FRIDAY.

CRUCIFYING THE WORLD.

“God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.”—*Gal. vi. 14.*

THERE were some of the first Christians who felt ashamed of the death to which their Master had been put. Not so St. Paul. To him it seemed altogether glorious. For him the Cross was the central feature, the dominant figure in all human history. He gloried in it above all things. It seemed to the world unutterably shocking and shameful. To him it seemed the most splendid thing in all the universe. It was a tremendous object lesson of the love of God. It was the great power of God unto salvation. It was the means by which Christ would draw all men unto Him. Its outstretched arms would gather in the whole world. He foresaw how it would “tower o’er the wrecks of time,” how

“all the light of sacred story would gather round its head sublime.” All his views of life and death and eternity, were influenced by the Cross. It seemed never to be absent from his thoughts.

When, therefore, he undertook to define his relations to the world, he could only see them in the light of the Cross, he could not think of them apart from the great transaction upon Calvary, he could only describe them in terms of the Cross. His language is somewhat foreign to the spirit of our age, but it is the mother tongue of the Christian heart. His words are strikingly vivid and significant.

Looking first upon the world's side of those relationships, he exclaims, “The world is crucified unto me.” What does He mean by that?

When Christ hung upon the Cross, the world thought it was condemning and crucifying Him. It was really condemning and crucifying itself. It was the world that led Him to the Cross and hung Him there, that drove the cruel nails, that challenged Him to come down from the Cross, that surged round its base and gloried in his shame. It was the world, not the Christ, who was on trial, who was condemned, who was eternally disgraced that day. St. Paul sees with the eye of faith, over against the three crosses of Calvary, another cross, a towering shameful cross

on which a wicked world, dishonoured, disgraced, and doomed, has hung itself. He can never forget that his Lord "was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not." ¹

It hated Him, rejected Him, did its best to destroy Him utterly. It strove to judge Him, but only judged itself. It convicted itself of the most awful wrongs which were ever done in heaven or earth. Since that day St. Paul could only think of the world as a self-condemned criminal gibbeted before the eyes of angels and men, a culprit whose base and bloody sin has found him out and brought its due reward, a malefactor whose evil purposes have been exposed and who is no longer to be feared. Henceforth, he regarded it and feared it no more than he would a condemned criminal writhing on a cross. The world was crucified to him.

But more. He was "crucified to the world." He was on the Cross with Christ. He viewed the world from the standpoint of the Cross of Christ. It had lost its charms, forfeited its claims. Its glamour was gone; he had nothing more to hope or to fear from it; he had done with the world. What did he care for its pleasures, its prizes, its good opinion, its sneers, or its

¹ St. John i. 10.

scorn? What could it offer to him who gloried in the Cross of Christ and believed it to be the throne of glory everlasting? The world was forever crucified to him, and he to the world.

Strong and shocking as St. Paul's language may seem to us, it is perfectly true. The world *did* crucify Christ, and it would do so again, if He came amongst us in the flesh to-day.

It is the same world, only a little better for nineteen centuries of Christianity. The only point from which the Christian can see the world in its true light is the Cross of Calvary. If he is a true Christian, he *must* see it from that point of view. He is crucified with Christ. He cannot forget the attitude of the world towards the Cross, cannot forget that the world made the Cross. He looks down from his Cross of glory where he hangs with Christ and sees the world on *its* cross, its cross of shame, and would not change places for all that the world has to give. He glories in his Cross.

Have we learned so to do? Are we looking at the world this Lent from the vantage-ground of the Cross? We must learn to do so, if we are to be joint-heirs with Christ in the triumphs He has won. We must identify ourselves with Him and look at the world from His point of view: the highest, the truest, the best standpoint from which to estimate its real worth.

Let us to-day earnestly beseech God to give us the spirit of St. Paul, to open our eyes, so that we may see how true it is that in the eternal sacrifice of the Cross the world is crucified unto us, and we unto the world.

THIRD WEEK IN LENT.

Mastery Over the World.

SATURDAY.

THE PROFIT AND LOSS OF WORLDLINESS.

“What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”—*St. Matt. xvi. 26.*

HERE is a plain practical question which ought to be driven home to every human heart. Our Blessed Lord did not deal in fine-spun theories, or dreamy sentiments. His words were the plainest, the directest, the profoundest which have ever sounded in human ears. Beside them all human speech is hollow, vain, and powerless. Study the words of the Lord Jesus and you will be more and more amazed at their marvelous insight, depth, and simplicity. In those which we have before us to-day He puts a searching question to the practical people of all ages, and especially to those of these money-getting days. It is a problem in profit

and loss which ought to appeal powerfully to the men of our time. With matchless energy, and tremendous industry, they are developing the material resources of this world, accumulating wealth, enlarging the boundaries of human knowledge, and pushing progress into undreamed-of developments. They take a business-like view of everything. They ask, "What does it cost? What is it worth? Is there any profit in it?" By this standard everything is weighed. Life is too short and too strenuous to be wasted upon things which have no profit in them. Even the amusements and pleasures of men are made to contribute to the main chance or sacrificed in its pursuit. Everything that claims a share in our modern life is challenged by the question, what is it worth? Men of the world ask this question ceaselessly. They bring literature, art, invention, conduct, religion,—everything to this test.

In all this they are right, that is, if their standards of judgment are right. God does the same. He tolerates nothing useless. There is not a superfluous atom in His whole universe. He comes to the busy men of to-day and says, "You are quite right. Like you, I ask to know what everything is worth? It is the part of prudence, not only to ask, but to *know*, what things are worth. I come to you and I put this question

to you. Answer me—the things of this world for which you are toiling, suffering, dying, what are they worth? You have two great enterprises before you: to gain the things of this world, and to win the things of the world to come. Which are worth the most to you? Are this world's goods the chief things; what is their value compared with the life of the soul; if you must choose between the two, which is worth the most; is it wise, is it reasonable, is it right for you to seek the one and sacrifice the other? The things of this world are many of them good, attractive, enjoyable; but are they the supreme things of life? Is there anything higher and more precious than they?" Here is the great problem of life, the vast responsibility of choice for every one. Which shall it be—"the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," or the higher "life that is hid with Christ in God?" Shall we gain the good things of this world, or the good things of God? Here is our alternative—an eternal life of worldliness, begun here and continued in the world to come; or an eternal life of Godliness, of union and communion with God, commenced here and consummated in the other world. There are a higher and a lower life. Which ought you as a reasonable being to choose? Suppose you could gain the whole world, realize all its joys, and grasp

its prizes every one: how much are they worth, how long can you keep them, will they satisfy you, will you be content with them? Suppose, on the other hand, you are called upon to give up all that the world has given you, can you do it, what would be the effect, will the loss be irreparable, will all happiness then be at an end for you?

Here is where the world makes one of its worst mistakes. When a man, by some error or misfortune in business, loses all his worldly goods, he cries out that he is "ruined," and the world with pity echoes the cry. But is it so? Is the light all gone out of his life? It is true that he will have to live in a more humble style, his wife may be forced to retire from society, his children may be denied some luxuries. His pride is humbled, his extravagance and luxurious living are at an end. But he himself may be saved. That deep experience may develop all his manlier qualities, prove how true and loving his wife is, and rescue his children from a life of pampered self-indulgence. The man who is really ruined may be the one who is left in possession of all his wealth, and whom the world calls prosperous, while the secret canker of pride and avarice is eating out his heart.

But cannot we have both the higher life of the soul and the good things of this world?

Yes, perhaps so. God has promised that, if we seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and his righteousness, all other things needful in this world shall be given us. But that is not the question. The real question is this: Can a wise, practical, sensible person permit himself to become so absorbed in pursuing the prizes of this world as to utterly neglect and ignore the higher life of his soul? Is there anything which, in a true view of human destiny, can compare with the priceless worth of an immortal soul?

Let us take this question home with us to-day, ponder it well in our hearts, and answer it truthfully to ourselves and to God.

FOURTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Adversity.

MONDAY.

THE SCHOOL OF LIFE.

"It is good for me that I have been in trouble that I may learn thy statutes."—*Psalm cxix. 71.*

WHEN we look out over the face of human life we find it full of adversity. We are confronted by the dark problem of pain. We find this life full of ups and downs, of reverses and calamities. We are almost ready to cry out with holy Job, "Man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward."¹ We ponder all this in our hearts, and are driven to ask, How can our good God permit it? "He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth Him of the evil."² And yet the world which He has made is full of trouble, and man whom He has created is a constant victim of adversity. How can we reconcile the sufferings of mankind with the doctrine of God's good Providence?

¹ Job v. 7.

² Joel ii. 13.

1. First we must remind ourselves that the troubles which so grievously afflict humankind do not originate from God. He did not send them into the world; they are not a part of his creative plans. They were brought into the world by man, and are the result of his fall from the state of grace in which God created him. They are the inevitable consequence of his sin. They result directly from the errors of his free will, and are the necessary incidents of his wandering from God.

2. But there is a counter truth which we must not fail to grasp. God turns all the adversities with which man afflicts himself to good account. He converts them to his own uses. Even "the fierceness of man shall turn to His praise."¹ God uses all human adversity to wean us from the world, draw us to Himself, and prepare us for a higher life.

A clever writer has recently published a book entitled the "School of Life," in which he shows at considerable length how the discipline of adversity is made use of by God to prepare us for the world to come. It is a perfectly true view of life. This world is an educational institution, a training-school into which our wise and loving Father puts us all for a time to learn the great lessons of life. Our Great Teacher

¹ Psalm lxxvi. 10.

is the Lord Jesus Christ, who teaches, not as the Scribes and Pharisees of human philosophy, but "with authority." His assistant teachers are the manifold vicissitudes of daily life. Every crisis of our experience in this world, every trial, every trouble, every calamity is made use of by God in His all-wise providence to help on the training of our souls.

Now in the School of Life what is the chief lesson which we have to learn? Is it not the hard old lesson of detachment from this world and union and communion with God?

Mankind is a prodigal race which has forsaken God, gone its own way, forgotten the pure pleasures of its Father's House, and is wasting its substance with riotous living. Sometimes in quiet hours there comes a faint gleam of heavenly light across its chosen path to remind it of its Father and its Home, but for most part it goes its way forgetful of its rich inheritance and careless of any higher life. It is so surfeited in the gross enjoyment of carnal lusts that it has lost all taste for spiritual things and become "earthly, sensual, devilish."

How shall this fallen race be won back to God? How shall it be weaned from worldly lusts, how shall it be taught the worthlessness of all that this world can give without God, how shall it be made to feel the difference

between the license of self-will and the "perfect freedom" of the life of service it has left behind? There is but one way. It must have the discipline of adversity. It must learn by bitter experience that man cannot find happiness apart from God, that worldliness cannot satisfy the soul, that there is a great famine in the land which he has chosen for his home, a famine of all which can feed his real life. He must find the pleasures of life failing him one by one, until at last he is reduced to the swinish husks which cannot dull the hunger of his soul. Then it may be that erring man will waken to some sense of his waywardness and loss, and say to himself, "I will arise and go to my Father, and will say unto Him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants" and take me home.¹

Such is the great lesson which most of us have to learn in the School of Life, the lesson of detachment from the world and loving union with our good God. Many of us are but slow of heart to learn it, and our loving Father has to watch and wait while we bring a multitude of sorrows on ourselves before we are ready to turn to Him and find rest for our souls. The

¹ St. Luke xv. 18, 19.

uncertainties and disappointments of life are God's monitors to point us to Heaven, which is our Home. All the ills that flesh is heir to are permitted by Him to show us our helplessness and drive us to Him for help. Every calamity which sends a shudder through the hearts of men ought to show us how frail is the hand of man and fix our thoughts upon God. Our living and loving Lord has his gentler lessons for us all, but our wayward hearts often force Him to inflict on us the stern discipline of adversity and teach us the hard lessons of experience before he can draw His erring children home.

Let us think upon these things this week, and let us resolve to-day that we will try to master the great lessons which we are set to learn in the school of adversity.

FOURTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Adversity.

TUESDAY.

BY POVERTY OF SPIRIT.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.—*St. Matt. v. 3.*”

WE said yesterday that Jesus is the Great Teacher in the School of Life. Near the beginning of His earthly ministry He went up into a mountain, apart from the distractions of human philosophy, and taught the world what it most needs to know. His Sermon on the Mount is the concentrated essence of all wisdom, human and divine. Let us try this week to learn some of the great Lessons of Life which it contains.

To-day let us consider the first beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit.”

Who are they?

Of all the results of human experience none is more repulsive to the natural man, and yet none is more forcibly brought home to him than the knowledge of the limitations of the life

which he lives in this world. Man plans great things, and cannot bring them to pass. He toils incessantly, and finds that he has laboured but in vain. He rises early, and goes late to rest, and eats the bread of carefulness, and is nothing profited in the end. He brings his highest powers of mind and body to bear in the battle of life and is defeated after all. He exhausts the cleverest devices of worldly foresight and policy, and all to no effect. His most far-reaching and best-laid schemes are brought to nought. He is baffled, beaten, thwarted, humiliated, disgraced, brought down to the ground, again and again. What does it all mean? What ought he to learn from it? If he will but see it, the lesson is very plain. He ought to learn his own littleness; he should see how utterly insignificant, and powerless, and worthless he is. It may take a lifetime to teach him this wholesome truth. His proud spirit of self-love and self-confidence is a slow learner in the school of experience. But the lessons given him there are not wanting in number and plainness, and are nicely adapted to his needs. God lets us fall and fail hopelessly until we learn not to trust ourselves, until at last we learn our utter helplessness. The first and best knowledge for every human soul, the beginning of wisdom, is the perception of its own pitiful weakness and

insignificance in the vast Universe of God. No soul is fit to begin life in earnest, to enter into its great inheritance, until it is conscious of its absolute poverty, and has fallen down in spiritual nakedness at the feet of the Most High God. "Verily, I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." ¹ When the soul has learned its own destitution and frailty and faultiness and sin, has emptied out all the pride and self-confidence with which it had been filled, and has turned humbly from itself to God, then it is ready to enter into His spiritual kingdom and be at rest in Him. This is the poverty of spirit taught by our Lord and His assistant teachers, the failures and vicissitudes of human experience. Blessed is he who can say, "Lord, I am not highminded, I have no proud looks. I do not exercise myself in great matters which are too high for me. But I refrain my soul and keep it low, like as a child that is weaned from his mother, yea, my soul is even as a weaned child." ²

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." What does this promise mean? It means that they are ready for, and entitled to, an entrance into the great spiritual Kingdom of God, the universal Church of

¹ St. Matt. xviii. 3.

² Psalm cxxxi. 1-3.

Christ. They are able to receive and enjoy all which the Church has to give them. Her Gospel, her sacraments, her ministries of grace, her superhuman and unworldly life, her sweet and strong relationships are theirs. By reason of their conversion into the spirit of Christ and new birth into God's great family, they are become "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." ¹

They need not wait till some distant time to enter into their inheritance; it is theirs here and now. For them the heavenly life is already begun. They have already taken hold upon that eternal life of union with God, which, beginning here and now, will go on widening and deepening and brightening eternally.

Blessed are the poor in spirit who have been always so, who have never lost the simplicity and trust and humility of a little child, who have always walked close with God, and have no need to turn to him in weeping, fasting, and praying amidst the darkening shadows of a weary and wasted life.

Blessed also are the poor in spirit, who, in the stern school of adversity, have learned to know the littleness of man, the greatness of God, and are content to lie like beggars by the Beautiful Gate of the temple of God.

¹ Romans viii. 17.

Lord, help us that “ the sense of our weakness may add strength to our faith, and seriousness to our repentance ” ; make us to feel our spiritual poverty and nakedness ; and turn us, even if need be, through the valley of humiliation, into the paths of righteousness, for thy Name’s sake.

FOURTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Adversity.

WEDNESDAY.

BY MEEKNESS.

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”—
St. Matt. v. 5.

MEEKNESS is a virtue little appreciated nowadays and much misunderstood. The world admires those who are prompt in their own defense. It is inclined to regard meekness as a weak, womanish sort of quality, which is too timid, too pliant, too passive to maintain its own rights, and so lets them go by default. But meekness and weakness are two very different things. Meekness is the perfection of strength. The meekest man is not the weakest but the strongest man. Let us take two examples.

1. Who is the meekest character in all human history? Jesus Christ. He said of Himself, “I am meek and lowly in heart.”¹

¹ St. Matt. xi. 29.

Was the character of Christ a weak character? Was it not the perfection of manly strength? He held proud priests and Pharisees at bay and denounced them to their face. The poor flocked to him for shelter as to "the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." He drove out with righteous and resistless fury those whom He found profaning His Father's House. He endured with splendid fortitude the scourge, the crown of thorns, the Cross. He made the Roman soldiers quail before Him in Gethsemane, and filled Caiaphas and Pilate with trembling on their judgment thrones. He was the pattern of meekness, but he was at the same time the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

2. Who was the meekest of men? Moses. Was his a weak character? Think what he did. For the love of God he mastered all the temptations of Egypt and "chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt."¹ He left wealth, honour, and the prospect of the most splendid of kingly thrones behind him and led a horde of fugitive slaves into a wild wilderness at the command of God. Again and again he made the mightiest monarch of the earth to tremble

¹ Hebrews xi. 25.

on his throne and humbled him to the dust. He displayed the most splendid generalship which the world has ever seen. Nothing could daunt him. He knew no fear and acknowledged no defeat. And yet he was the meekest of men.

Meekness, then, is not weakness but strength, solid and sublime strength of character. It is based upon absolute confidence. The meek man is so sure of himself, so sure of God, that he can endure anything. He knows in whom he has put his trust and he will not be afraid, "though the earth be moved, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof rage and swell, and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same."¹ He "endures as seeing him who is invisible."² His heart is stayed upon God and he will not fear what man can do unto him. He knows that God is for him. Who can be against him? He is at one with God and feels underneath him the everlasting arms. He sees behind the pillar of cloud and of fire the High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity. "The waves of the sea are mighty and rage horribly, but yet the Lord who dwelleth on high is mightier."³ Therefore he is serene and undis-

¹ Psalm xlv. 2, 3.

² Hebrews xi. 27.

³ Psalm xciii. 5.

mayed amidst all the world's storms. Therefore he "suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not himself, is not puffed up, doth not behave himself unseemly, seeketh not his own, is not easily provoked, beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."¹ There is no passion in him, in quietness and confidence is found his strength. His "soul truly waiteth still upon God."²

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." What does this promise mean? Does it say that all which this world has to give shall ultimately be given them? No. This, like most of our Lord's promises, is spiritual. They shall inherit that "new heaven and new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness."³ But even in this world they shall begin to enjoy their reward. Nothing mars the happiness of this world so much as those exacting ambitions and turbulent passions whose sway in the heart is most opposed to meekness. They who have cast off the dominion of avarice and hatred, and set themselves free from care and anxiety, these grow daily in calmness and serenity and spiritual strength, are more and more detached from this world, more and more closely joined to God.

¹ I. Cor. xiii. 4-7.

² Psalm lxii. 1.

³ II. St. Peter iii. 13.

Having surrendered themselves wholly to Him, they are not too much disturbed when adversities come upon them. They simply say, "It is the Lord, let Him do what seemeth Him good."¹ They receive all trouble and adversity as something permitted in God's good providence, endurable by His help, and convertible into new spiritual strength of character. They have gained the mastery over adversity and have already in anticipation come off more than conquerors in the battle of life.

Let us ask of God to-day, that He will strengthen our faith in Him, and give us a possession that "is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price."²

¹ I. Sam. iii. 18.

² I. St. Peter iii. 4.

FOURTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Adversity.

THURSDAY.

BY MOURNING.

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”—
St. Matt. v. 4.

THE world does not think so. It regards the sorrows and losses of human life as a grievous burden, often almost too heavy to be borne. It never says, “It is good for me that I have been in trouble.” It considers every bereavement as a calamity, and does not discern the uses of adversity. It blames God for permitting the existence of sorrow in His world.

But the world’s view is a shallow and short-sighted one. It forgets that sorrow was not in the world as God made it, but was brought in by the sin of man. Nor can it see how afflictions are made use of by God to wean us from worldliness. And yet this is one of the fundamental facts of human experience. He who has lost

nothing which this world has given him, how shall he learn to set his "affections on things above, not on things on the earth?" He who has with him in this world all whom he holds most dear, how shall he grasp the great realities of the world unseen and realize his relationship to the souls in Paradise? It is when, "amidst the changes and chances of this mortal life," we lose what we value most, that God reaches out and draws us most mightily to Himself. It is when He removes into the invisible world the lives which we have most loved, that we begin to learn of that world, to comprehend something of its life, and to prepare to join them in the unseen. Mourning is the means which God uses to draw many to himself who had been fast bound by the enjoyments and affections of this world. It is the bitter but wholesome medicine by which the sickness of many a soul is cured.

Mourning has marvelous power to purify and ennoble and uplift the heart of man. It dispels at once many of the illusions of life, and shows him what his soul craves for most. It reduces the ordinary events and interests of life to their true proportions, and shows him how little after all this world has to give. It brings out all that is best in him, wakens all his finer sensibilities, and stirs his nobler self within him.

It exalts and dignifies his strongest affections and relationships, lifts them up out of the narrow horizon of this present world, and sets them aloft in heavenly places where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Henceforth, they are not things of time, but of eternity. They are no longer “of the earth earthy” but, refined and spiritualized, form a sweet and sacred side of our life which is hid with Christ in God.

There are some souls who never mourn. They are too hard, too busy, too satisfied. But they are not the purest, noblest, loveliest souls; their life is not the highest life. They are living upon the lowest levels of human experience. It is they who have climbed painfully up to the hills from whence cometh their help, and left behind them the lowlands of common life, who breathe the pure air of heaven, and are nearest to God. For God has mourned, and it is Godlike to mourn.

Reflect, O my soul. Has God lost anything? Has He been afflicted? Does He indeed mourn? Yes, we must say it reverently, God has had His losses too. Nothing of His material universe can be lost, not one atom of it can go to waste. But something more precious, namely, *souls* can be lost. Satan and his angels are lost. Man whom God has made in His Own Image is a fallen creature, redeemed as a race, it is true,

but many of them are squandering their lives, losing their souls. God looks down upon a rebellious, suffering, sinning race, and mourns their fall. What was it caused the agony in the garden of Gethsemane? It was the awful, shocking, crushing consciousness of human sin, which bowed the Incarnate God down to the ground and broke His heart. He was a "man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." And why? Was it because He had no place to lay His head? because He suffered bodily pain? because He was an outcast from human society? No, not so much for these as because He felt so keenly, so bitterly, so heavily, the burden of the world's sins. It was the awful sense of sin which made Him the Lamb of God.

Every Christ-like man will go mourning all his days for sin. First and chiefly for his own sin, so dark, so deceitful, so hateful to himself, so unlovely in the sight of God. And then for the sins of mankind, so black, so vast, so desperate, so foul, so defiling to this fair world which God has made. Sin in the heart of man, that temple made without hands to be God's dwelling place; sin in the mind of man, which was made to be like the mind of Christ; sin in the body of man, which God has made to bear about His Image in this world; sin on this earth which God has made so bright and beautiful; sin among all

nations and peoples which dwell on the face of the earth; sin in the Church, which is the Bride of Christ and where God's honor dwells; must we not mourn for these? "Blessed are they that mourn" over the sin and shame and crime of a lost world, for in their mourning they are at one with God.

All who truly mourn shall be comforted, not simply soothed and consoled, but "comforted." Their mourning shall strengthen them. It was so with the Chief Mourners of the world, they who mourned a crucified Lord. When the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, was come, they were instantly converted from a timid band of despised and dejected Galilean peasants into a glorious company of Apostles, a noble army of Martyrs, bold as lions to face a frowning world. They were comforted, strengthened in their mourning.

So will it be with us, if we sorrow after a Godly sort. Our sorrow will be turned into joy, for we will have mourned with Christ and may rejoice with Him, when He comes again, in the Great Easter Day,

"To terminate the evil,
To diadem the right."

Then shall God "wipe away all tears from our eyes and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain, for the former things are passed away." ¹

¹ Rev. xxi. 4.

FOURTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Adversity.

FRIDAY.

BY MAKING PEACE.

“Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God.”—*St. Matt. v. 9.*

As we meditate upon one after another of the Beatitudes with which our Lord began His Sermon on the Mount, we see how far removed they are from the maxims of the world. Even after nineteen Christian centuries men are only beginning to attain to them. When first spoken they were in flat contradiction to the sentiments of the whole world. Up to that time it had been considered Godlike to make war. The favourite heathen deities were the gods of war. Even the chosen people of God expected a conquering Messiah, a great Deliverer from their enemies. Since Christianity has somewhat changed the conceptions of deity and taught us to think of the Prince of Peace as the perfect incarnation of godliness, it is difficult for us to

realize how radical has been the revolution of human thought. And yet even now "the world" has not learned to say, Blessed are the peace-makers. It says, Blessed are the war-makers, still. Its loudest praises, its highest honors, its most munificent rewards are reserved for those who wage successful war. It feasts, and flatters, and lauds to the skies the heroes of civil or international strife, and cares nothing for those who "follow after the things which make for peace." It has not learned its great lesson yet. It still delights in war.

In direct opposition to the spirit of the world is the mind of Christ. Our Blessed Lord is the great Peace-maker between man and man, between man and God. He visited this world "to guide our feet into the way of peace."¹ He left it with these gracious words upon His lips, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you."² "He maketh wars to cease in all the world, He breaketh the bow, and snappeth the spear in sunder, and burneth the chariots in the fire."³ Christianity, so far as its spirit has prevailed, has brought "peace on earth, good will among men." It teaches men to "seek peace and pursue it."⁴ It has helped them to see

¹ St. Luke i. 79.

³ Psalm xlvi. 9.

² St. Luke xiv. 27.

⁴ Psalm xxxiv. 13.

that peace-making is nobler, grander, more glorious than war-making. It has taught them to sacrifice pride, and prejudice, and privilege, and even rights, for the sake of peace. It urges them to bear opposition and injury and injustice, rather than resort to war. It exhorts them to "let patience have her perfect work." ¹ Its God is the God of Peace, and its Lord is the Prince of Peace.

If we are to be true Christians, if we are to "be called the children of God," we must be peace-makers.

1. We must make peace between ourselves and God. This is the first step in peace-making. It is impossible for us to make peace between our fellow-men so long as our own hearts are the seat of war. We must be at peace within before we can make peace without. When the leaven of malice and wickedness has been purged out of our own hearts, when we have put away the sins which God hates, when we have made our peace with God, then we may begin to make peace among men. Solomon said of old, "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city." ² And we may likewise say, He that hath subdued the passions which war within him and surrendered his whole heart to God is worthy of greater

¹ St. James i. 4.

² Prov. xvi. 32.

honours than the victor on earth's most famous battle-field. He has found "the way of peace."

2. When we have made our peace with God, then comes the second step, which we shall find much easier than before. We shall long to be at peace with all our fellow-men. Since we are reconciled to God, it is far easier to be reconciled with them. The grievances which before seemed to us so great, the injuries which we resented so bitterly, the angry passions which flamed up so hotly within us, how different they look in the light of the Cross of Christ. In that clear effulgence all our human strifes sink away into insignificance, and the calm peace of God, which passeth all understanding, fills our hearts and minds. "The love of Christ constraineth us" to love our fellow-men.

3. Then at last, having made our peace with God and with all mankind, we can "follow after the things which make for peace." It is a difficult but blessed task, one which unites us very closely with Christ, the Great Peacemaker. To still the strife of tongues, to quench the fierce fires of passion which consume so many hearts, to lead men into the way of peace—this is Godlike work. How much of it have we done hitherto? Have we used all our opportunities? Is there anyone in the world to-day to whom our words or our influence have

gone out and reconciled him to his brother-man? There ought to be many such. Each of us ought to be doing something in his own place and way to bring to pass the great Christian ideal of "peace on earth and good will among men."

"Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called (shall be recognized as) the sons of God." Blessed beyond words shall they be who labour to restore the broken unity of the Church of Christ, to bring again the peace which has been lost through the sins and separations of the members of Christ in former times, to hasten the fulfillment of our Lord's prayer that all Christians may be at one. Here is a great peace-making for which every true heart must work and pray. Let us make it our fervent prayer to-day that our Lord Jesus Christ, who said unto his apostles, Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you, may regard not our sins, but the faith of His Church, and grant her that peace and unity which are agreeable to His will.

FOURTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Adversity.

SATURDAY.

THROUGH PERSECUTION.

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven.—*St. Matt. v. 10-12.*

IN this last beatitude our Blessed Lord reaches the extremity of unworldliness. The idea of rejoicing in unmerited sufferings, of glorying in persecution, is utterly alien to the tone and temper of those who love this present world. It seems to them but little short of insanity. The worldly Christians of to-day think lightly of the martyrs of the Ages of Faith, and never dream of themselves enduring anything for the cause of Christ.

And yet the endurance of persecution for Christ's sake has always been one of the most

prominent features of Christianity. The Church has always wrung her successes out of defeats, has flourished under oppression, has thrived under adversity. The blood of the martyrs has been always the seed of the Church. It could not have been otherwise. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord."¹ The followers of Christ must *follow* Him. They must travel the same thorny pathway which He trod. They must confront the Scribes and Pharisees of their day. They must have their Herod, their Pilate, their Calvary. "All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."² We must make up our minds to that. The worldly world hates genuine goodness; is shamed, reproached, goaded to fury in its presence. True goodness will never be left long unmolested. Whenever and wherever the Church is true to her Lord she will have persecutions to bear.

We of to-day need to remember this. We need to ask, What is our Church suffering for Christ? Where are her confessors for the Faith, her martyrs, her sufferers for Christ? Has she sunk down into the low and mistaken belief that the ages of persecution are past, that she

¹ St. Matt. x. 24, 25.

² II Tim. iii. 12.

has no blood to shed for Christ? Let her look across the seas to that ancient branch of Christ's Church, feeble in the eyes of men, but glorious in the sight of God, the Church in Armenia, which is giving her martyrs by hundreds, and her patient sufferers by thousands, to the sacred cause of Christ. Who shall dare to say that, despised, forsaken, almost destroyed, she is not the most blessed part of Christendom? Shall not her splendid example of faithful endurance waken the Church throughout the world to do and dare for Christ? Shall not the story of her martyrdoms send us back to the heroic days of faith to learn what Christians have done and borne for Christ? We do not know enough of the holy men of old. We do not read enough of the lives of the saints. We lose the joy and stimulus which we ought to draw from our Catholic heritage of history. The Church of to-day needs to unite herself in sympathy, in faith, in suffering with the persecuted Church of the past.

As individual Christians also we need to ask ourselves, Is my Christianity genuine enough to subject me to persecution for righteousness' sake? Every true Christian will have something to endure from the enemies of the Cross of Christ. Perhaps not stripes, or imprisonment, or martyrdom, but petty persecution,

constant, galling, painful. The world has cruel weapons with which to punish those who will not submit to its demands, and it shows no mercy in the use of them. If a Christian will sacrifice his principles and conform to the world, he may go unhurt. But if he will be true to his Master and himself, he shall soon learn how sharp and merciless they are. Until then he has not made full proof of his ministry. Until then he has not been prepared by the stern discipline of adversity to enter into the joy of his Lord. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." ¹

This beatitude has one limitation of which we must not lose sight. It is only those who are persecuted "for righteousness' sake," only those against whom evil is said "falsely, for Christ's sake," who can appropriate its promise to themselves. Much of that which we have to bear, great part of the opposition which we meet, is simply the result of our own weakness and wrong-doing. Some of the evil which is said against us is only too true. We ought to endure all this uncomplainingly, but that is a

¹ I St. Peter iv. 12, 13.

very different thing from suffering for Christ's sake. St. Peter spoke out of a deep and long experience of persecution for Christ's sake when he wrote these words. "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf." ¹

As the fruit of this meditation let us form within ourselves three resolves.

1. That we will learn more of the lives of God's saints. It is a wise plan to read devotionally day by day each year the biography of some martyr or confessor, and try to catch from the story of their lives something of the spirit which animated them.

2. That we will expect persecution as a natural and needful element in our Christian experience. Thus we shall not be taken off our guard nor thrown into too great anxiety when it bursts upon us. We shall simply accept it as a part and proof of our discipleship, and go bravely and gladly on our way.

3. That we will pray for those who despitefully use us and persecute us. Prayer is the trusty weapon with which persecution may be met and mastered. Taking St. Stephen, the

¹ I St. Peter iv. 15, 16.

first martyr of the Christian Church, as our example, let us learn to love and bless our persecutors. While they work their will upon us, let us look up steadfastly into Heaven and beseech our Lord to "lay not this sin to their charge."

FIFTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Sin.

MONDAY.

THE MYSTERY OF INIQUITY.

“The mystery of iniquity.”—*II. Thess. ii. 7.*

HUMAN life is full of mysteries, of things whose existence we cannot doubt, but which we can never wholly understand, until in the great hereafter we shall know even as we are known. The Christian Faith has its great mysteries, its tremendous truths, which transcend the boundaries of human thought, and which, so long as we are in this world, can never be fully explained to us. But of all mysteries one of the deepest, darkest, most perplexing is that of which St. Paul speaks, the Mystery of Iniquity. It is one which challenges the consideration of every mind, and of which we ought especially to think in Lent. Let us take it as the subject of our meditations this week.

There is nothing in the world more evident than the fact of sin. No thinking being can deny its existence. It is everywhere, in every land, in every life. It penetrates every department of life, colors most of our waking and sleeping thoughts, and makes its mark on every soul. We cannot take any true views of life, we cannot form any wise plans, we cannot have any genuine religion, which leave out of sight the great fact of human sin. There is sin in the world, sin in the Church, sin in the heart of every man. There is none without sin, no, not one. "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."¹ Until we have learned this, we have missed one of the plainest and most profitable lessons of human experience.

But we have no sooner grasped the great fact of sin than the Mystery of Iniquity begins to press upon us. How did sin come into the world? Where did it come from? How did it gain a foothold here? How could our good God permit it to plant itself and make havoc in His world? These questions have always agitated the minds of men, and they always will, until they shall finally be solved along with other problems of human life and destiny at the Last Great Day. Holy Scripture, while it throws light upon them, does not make them

¹ Romans iii. 10, 12, 23.

plain. They remain a mystery. The more we have to do with sin, the more closely we study it, the more fiercely we contend against it, the deeper becomes our sense of its subtlety, its terror, its mystery. It looms above the world, and casts its awful shadow over human life, and leagues its silent superhuman forces against our souls, and sometimes scares us into helplessness and paralyzes us with vague and nameless fears. It brooded over Calvary, and gathered round the Cross, and shut out the sight of the Sinless Sufferer from human eyes, and smote the bystanders with a strange sense of awe. It tortured the soul of our Saviour on the Cross, and wrung from Him that bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It dogs the steps of every follower of Christ, and presses home upon him a multitude of deep questions to test his courage and to try his faith.

There is the old question of the origin of sin. How did it begin? How did it get into the world? Why did God suffer it to gain its hold upon men? To this question we can give no complete reply. Basing our belief upon the Word of God, we may say that the possibility of evil is inherent in the creation of the world. Evil is not a positive thing in itself, but is the perversion and failure of something which was

good. When, therefore, God created man in His own Image and pronounced him good, the possibility of sin began. In the exercise of the free will which man must have in order that he might do good, it was open to him to choose the evil and refuse the good. If man was to be an intelligent and responsible being, he must have that power of choice in which resides the opportunity of sin. But after this is said the origin of evil remains a deep mystery still.

Nor is it much easier to explain the permanence and power of evil in the world. "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men to see if there were any that would understand and seek after God. But they are all gone out of the way; they are altogether become abominable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues have they deceived; the poison of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and unhappiness is in their ways; and the way of peace have they not known; there is no fear of God before their eyes." ¹

Speaking broadly, this is a true view of human life as it looks to-day in the sight of God. How can a good and holy God permit

¹ Psalm xiv. 3-7.

His world to continue in such a state? Why does He not come at once to right all wrongs and root out evil from the world? This is the anxious inquiry of all true and loyal hearts, and it finds no full and adequate reply. We grieve over the growth of sin and the awful havoc which it makes, and long for the triumphant coming of our King. We utter with increasing anxiety our oft-renewed complaint, "Why tarry the wheels of His chariot? Why is His chariot so long in coming?"¹ And there comes no voice of God or man to tell us all that we would know. Not until "the day break and the shadows flee away," and we stand in the dawn of the eternal Easter Day, shall the Mystery of Iniquity be made plain, and we shall "see of the travail of our souls and be satisfied."

To-day let us take a few thoughts to comfort us in our ignorance.

1. Our belief in the goodness of God need not be shattered by the existence of sin in His world. We have ample proof of His holiness and His good-will towards mankind. When human sin and the world's wickedness seem to impeach the moral government of God, we must remember how limited our powers of judgment are, how little we know after all of

¹ Judges v. 28.

the complicated movements of life in this world and the next. Then we shall not be in haste to judge God.

2. Human sin has called forth the most wonderful manifestations of God's love. The exhibition of His patience and tenderness in dealing with sinners, and the sacrifice of His well-beloved Son for the sins of the whole world have taught us, as perhaps nothing else could, the depth of divine love, and have helped us to know God.

3. God overrules the evil in the world towards the accomplishment of His own purposes. However much the powers of evil may seem to be enlarged, however insolently they may seem to triumph over us, God ruleth over all, and in His own good time they all shall be subdued and even "the fierceness of man shall turn to His praise."

Let us comfort ourselves with these thoughts while we ponder over the fathomless Mystery of Iniquity.

FIFTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Sin.

TUESDAY.

THE PERVASIVENESS OF SIN.

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.—1 *St. John i. 8.*

YESTERDAY we thought of sin as a falling short of the end for which God created us, a failure to fulfil all righteousness. To-day let us think of it as a positive force in the world. Since it has found an entrance into the world and planted itself in the midst of human life, it has become an active principal of unrighteousness pervading everything. It is energetic, aggressive, intrusive. It cannot rest content with any conquest which it has made, but is ever pressing on to gain new ground. It is infectious and spreads like a malignant disease with startling rapidity. It is but little abashed by defeat, and feels but slight restraint from fear or shame. It boldly enters everywhere.

It invaded Paradise and tempted the parents of our race. It corrupted the old world and drew it away from God. It beset the holiest men of old. It contaminated the whole national and religious life of the chosen people of God. It thrust itself into that sacred solitude where our blessed Lord at the threshold of his earthly ministry communed with God. It invaded the sacred circle of His apostles, and dragged down one of them to a despairing death. It entered the palace of the High Priest, and persuaded the rulers of the Jewish Church to condemn to death the Messiah whom God had sent. It persecuted the Church of Christ until the earth was drenched with blood. We are assured that before the end of the world it shall oppose and exalt itself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that it as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing itself that it is God. ¹

To such awful lengths has sin gone; in such frightful blasphemy will it culminate. When we look out over human life, we are forced to make the sad confession, the trail of the serpent is over it all. We might have thought that there would be some avenues of life from which sin would be shut out, some characters beyond its reach, some holy places where it would not dare to show itself. But no, there is no spot

¹ II. Thess. ii. 4.

so sacred that it will not venture there, no heart so pure that sin will not knock at its door, no life so holy as to be beyond the reach of sin. There has been but one sinless human Life, and that was beyond all other lives beset and buffeted by the powers of sin.

What is true of sin in the world, is still more strikingly true of it in its assaults upon each individual soul.

There is no soul beyond the reach of sin. However close we may have come to Christ, however complete our consecration to Him may be, no matter what heights of sanctity we may have gained, no matter how truly we may have repented of our sins past, we must never flatter ourselves that we are safe. Holy Scripture, with its frank and fearless record of the lives of David, and Solomon, and Peter, and Judas, warns us that there is no life which sin may not invade and endanger and hurl down to the ground. To think that, however pervasive the powers of sin may be, *we* are out of their reach, is to make a soul-destroying mistake. "If we say that we have no sin (that we are beyond the reach of sin), we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

There is no time nor place in which we will not be beset by sin. It confronted our Blessed Lord as He came up out of waters of baptism,

dogged His footsteps all through His ministry, followed Him into the temple courts, interrupted His teachings, explained away His miracles, intruded upon His hours of solitude, embittered His agony in the garden and on the Cross. Surely then it will not spare us. In our baptismal purity, when apostolic hands have just been laid upon our brow, in the first fervor of some reconsecration of ourselves to Christ in the hour of prayer, in the house of God, beside the altar rail, in every hallowed place and every holy hour, satan will seek us out and redouble his assaults upon our soul. There is no safety for us but in sleepless vigilance and undying distrust of self.

If we would gain the mastery over sin, there is another fact of which we must remind ourselves. There is no sin which, once expelled from our heart, will not seek to return. When in Lent, or at some other time, we have gathered up all the energies of our soul and hurled them against some sin which is undermining our spiritual health, and have fought it bravely to the death, we must not think that we shall see its face no more. We may be quite sure that sooner or later it will return, perhaps in some new and more seductive form, and seek to regain its hold upon our heart. There are besetting sins which besiege, and persecute, and

pursue human souls relentlessly. We battle against them, and sometimes think that we have overcome them and put them once for all under our feet. But in an hour when we think not they will return, perhaps in some more subtle form, but still the same old familiar sins. So long as life lasts we shall never be free from their insidious attacks.

These thoughts of the energy and persistent intrusiveness of sin are enough to alarm and bewilder us. They ought to put us on our guard and make us very watchful against the constantly renewed assaults of sin. But they ought not to drive us into despondency. Christ conquered sin upon the Cross. Ever since He won that splendid victory, its power among men has been growing less. The forces that make for righteousness are increasing and triumphing everywhere. They that are for us are more than they that are against us. "If God be for us, who can be against us?"¹ The ultimate triumph of the powers of good is assured. Slowly but surely the glorious victory of right over wrong is being won. The waves of sin "are mighty and rage horribly, but yet the Lord who dwelleth on high is mightier."² If we put our trust in Him, we need not fear the powers of sin, however active and subtle

¹ Romans viii. 31.

² Psalm xciii. 5.

they may be. Let us try then to-day, to deepen in ourselves these two thoughts:

1. The sleepless energy and shameless effrontery of sin.

2. And the comforting assurance of its final overthrow in every heart where Christ is King.

FIFTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Sin.

WEDNESDAY.

THE DECEITFULNESS OF SIN.

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”—*Jeremiah xvii, 9.*

THERE is in the heart of man a tendency to do wrong, a moral weakness inherited from the parent of our race, which makes it easy for us to sin. But there is also in the human heart a tendency to do right, implanted by God when He made man in His own Image, and transmitted to every soul born into this world. There are the elements of good and evil in every life. But blessed be God, the forces which make for righteousness are so well intrenched in the human heart and are so formidable that the powers of evil are driven to deceit and strategy when they attempt to dislodge them. Sin seldom dares to fight in open field. It lies in ambush, masks and hides itself,

puts on friendly guise, and talks of peace when there is war in its heart. It will not fight fair. It is full of subtlety, deceit, and artifice. Its victims are won by guile and hypocrisy.

How seldom does a man deliberately surrender himself to sin? He does not at first see it in its naked ugliness. It comes to him cunningly disguised, decently clad, with all its repulsive features hidden out of sight. It excuses, apologizes for, justifies itself. It masquerades in the garb of virtue. It ingratiates itself craftily into its victim's confidence, and lulls to sleep his fears. The miser, the spendthrift, the liar, the thief, the traitor, the murderer, all have their excuses, their sophistries, their justifications of self. If sin is to find an entrance into the heart of man, it must disguise itself and enter under an assumed name. Nor does it throw off the disguise as soon as it finds itself within. It artfully conceals its real purposes, until it has eaten out the heart of that wretched man and done its fatal work. Then at last there comes an awful day when its borrowed robes are cast aside, and it rises up in all its naked hideousness to rule the heart which it has won. Then its miserable victim sees how he has been beguiled, and all the world is shocked as it sees him plunge into the bottomless pit of iniquity.

Take a living example of this. Take Judas Iscariot. His life seems full of promise at the start. He is a man of good impulses, of irreproachable conduct, of high business and executive ability. He is brought into contact with Jesus Christ, his heart goes out to Him, he loves Him. Jesus loves him, He sets His heart upon him, calls him to be the trusted companion of His daily life, one of the chief foundation-stones of His Kingdom among men. His fellow apostles recognize his excellent qualities. They make him their treasurer and entrust to him all that they have in this world. The whole management of their affairs is left to him.

But there is one root of evil in his heart, a love of money for its own sake. He cannot bear to see it go to waste. He thinks his Master is not careful enough for the things of this world. He resolves to pursue a worldly-wise and prudent policy. He will hoard their scanty store of wealth more closely than his Lord. He will not let it go to every wandering worthless beggar who may cross their path. None of it must be spent except for the most urgent need. He will increase it at every chance. And so the purse-strings draw tighter day by day, his mind becomes more and more absorbed in earthly things, the deceitfulness of riches

gnaws secretly within his heart. At last one day a holy woman in an ecstasy of loving gratitude pours out from an alabaster box a pound of ointment of spikenard, very precious, upon the body of her Lord. The heart of Judas is torn by a paroxysm of envious rage. "To what purpose is this waste? Why was not this ointment sold for 300 pence and given to the poor?"¹ This he said, not because he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and had the bag, and bore what was put therein.

What a revelation have we here! Judas, the man of honour, the bearer of responsibility, the chosen companion of Christ, the scrupulous administrator of his Master's affairs, has fallen a prey to the sin of avarice, has become a thief, has rebuked his Lord. It will not be long until, goaded on by his secret sin, he will sell the King of Glory into the hands of His enemies and sink into a dishonoured grave. Who that knows the sad story of his life and death can ever doubt the deceitfulness of sin?

Let us try to bring this truth home to ourselves to-day. We see the deceitfulness of sin in other lives. We shudder as we watch it tightening its serpent coils round other souls. But we are strangely blind to its cunning assaults upon ourselves. It creeps so softly

¹ St. John xii. 5, 9.

into our hearts, makes such good excuses for its entrance there, seems so powerless for harm, simulates the likeness of virtue so cleverly, that we are thrown entirely off our guard. We are too blind to see that we are entertaining evil angels unawares. Often we do not discover our mistake until it is too late. It was thus that the sin of avarice gained the mastery over Judas' heart. It disguised itself under the mask of faithfulness to the trust imposed upon him by his fellow apostles and his Lord, pretended to be zealous for their worldly interests, championed the cause of the poor, and feigned righteous indignation in their behalf. So secretly did it do its work that none of the apostles knew what ruin it had wrought. Judas himself, when the sad announcement was made that one of them should betray their Lord, inquired like the rest, "Lord, is it I?" It was not until his sin had gone to the most awful length that he saw how completely he had become its slave. Such is the deceitfulness of sin.

Let us then look to ourselves. When the awful truth of the duplicity of sin is forced home to our hearts, when we see others falling victims to its wiles, when we hear our Saviour's warning cry—"Behold, he is at hand that doth betray Me," when inspired voices tell us that by

their sins men crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh and put Him to an open shame, let us ask very anxiously, very earnestly, Lord, is it I? Let us look deep into our hearts and search out our sins before it be too late.

FIFTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Sin.

THURSDAY.

THE LAWLESSNESS OF SIN.

“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth the law, for sin is the transgression of the law.”—*I. St. John iii. 4.*

TO-DAY let us go a little deeper into the Mystery of Iniquity and ask ourselves the searching question, What is sin? Perhaps St. Augustine will give us the best reply. He defines it as “Something said, or done, or desired, in opposition to the Eternal Law of God.” Sin, therefore, is disobedience, transgression, lawlessness. The sinner is one who has broken loose from all restraint, taken things into his own hands, and resolved to be a law unto himself. He declines to acknowledge any authority higher than that of his own will. He makes his own judgment supreme, and insists upon going his own way unhindered by any requirements human or divine. Let us see what this means and involves.

We find ourselves born into a material and spiritual universe, and made partakers of its life and destiny. We learn by many infallible proofs that this universe of which we are a part was made and is sustained and governed by a Supreme Divine Being, whom we call God. It owes its existence entirely to Him, and He has absolute power over it. It is in His hands. He governs it upon certain fixed principles, which we call the laws of nature. These laws are not arbitrary or capricious rules laid down by Him to please Himself. They are based upon the eternal realities of things. They arise out of the necessities of the case. They could not be other than they are. They spring naturally and inevitably out of the constitution of the universe. They are simply the perfect methods by which a Supreme Being, infinitely powerful and wise and good, must maintain the universe which He has made. They are God's way of securing the welfare and safety of the human race.

The laws of God, then, are only the beneficent provisions which our Creator has made for our security. So long as they are observed we can dwell in safety, and can hope for happiness. "All things work together for good to them that love God." ¹ God destined the

¹ Romans viii. 28.

human race for an eternal life of happiness, and placed mankind in an environment where everything was divinely planned with a view to his best interests. It is therefore expedient that man should accept the conditions of life under which he finds himself placed, and make the best of them. To reject them or ignore them, to refuse to submit to them, to undertake to readjust them to suit himself, or to live in open revolt against them, is to make a most awful mistake. It is to throw away the hope of happiness, to cast aside all that his good God has given him, to put himself out of harmony with his environment, to thrust himself into antagonism with all the mighty forces which are at work in the universe.

But it is much more than this. It is to wound and insult and defy Almighty God. What can be more shameful than the sight of man lifting himself up against his Maker, trusting in his own wisdom, presuming to find fault with the provisions which God has made for his best good, repudiating the principles of God's moral government of the world, and living a life of open disobedience to his Maker's will? If we could stand apart and witness for the first time the spectacle of man rebelling against God, which of us would not shudder at the sight? Which of us would fail to realize

the frightful folly and desperate wickedness of that misguided man? It is only because the sight is so familiar that we are blinded to its terrible significance.

Sin, then, in its essence, consists in a violation of the divine order of human life. It is rebellion, revolt, resistance against the Sovereign Ruler of the universe. It is the creature against the Creator, the child against the Father, man against God. It violates, outrages, and destroys all the sweet and strong relationships which bind men to God. It introduces disorder, distrust, and anarchy into God's world. It means, if it should go on unchecked, the utter destruction of this fair world, and the defeat of God's good purposes in the creation of mankind. Every sin, even that which we call the least, is great and terrible in reality, because it involves a violation of God's righteous law. Every sin falls like a blow upon the tender, loving heart of God, and cuts asunder one more of the cords which bind us to Him.

But there is another side of this subject of which we need to think, and it ought to come very close home to us. Human sin involves outrage to God and also hurt to man. Human happiness and the soul's health can only be found in obedience to God. St. Augustine was right when he exclaimed, "Thou, O God, hast

made us for Thyself, and our heart is restless and unquiet until it find rest in Thee." There is no rest, no peace for the soul apart from God. To forsake Him is to make for oneself a hell, for the chief suffering of hell consists in the sense of separation from God.

Now sin is the great separator; it separates man from man, and man from God. Sin robs God of his creatures, and robs man of his happiness. It makes a great gulf between men, and a still wider one between them and their God. Its essential principle is selfishness, that hateful passion which not only disregards the rights of God but grasps at what belongs to our fellow-men, snatches greedily at the prizes of this world and loses the good things of God. When we look out over the world and see the lawlessness of sin, we do not need to ask whence come the miseries of mankind. We only wonder that the human race has not been utterly destroyed from off the face of the earth by its sins.

Let us think to-day of humanity as a prodigal race which has chafed under the benevolent restraints of home, forsaken the shelter of its Father's House, demanded its portion of God's goods, and wilfully gone its own way. It has wandered into a far country, wasted its substance with riotous living, and is now reduced

to wretched want and misery. Its proud and wayward heart yet unsubdued, it feeds upon the swinish husks of a gross carnal life, and sinks daily into deeper abysses of wickedness. Why does it not arise and go to its Father, and say unto Him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before Thee, and am no more worthy to be called Thy son; make me as one of Thy hired servants?" If there is joy in Heaven over one sinner that repenteth, how great would be the rejoicing over the return of the whole human race!

But let us bring this question nearer home and ask it of ourselves. We who are meditating to-day upon the lawlessness of sin, we whose sins have separated us from God, we weary wanderers in the ways of this world, why do we not go back at once to our Father's House, and cast ourselves humbly at His feet? How quick, and glad, and warm would be our welcome home!

FIFTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Sin.

FRIDAY.

THE MALIGNITY OF SIN.

“ And the Lord God said unto the serpent, because thou hast done this, thou art accursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel.”—*Genesis iii. 14, 15.*

WE were thinking yesterday of the good providence of God, and of the way in which it is lawlessly disdained by men and thwarted by their sins. But we must go further to-day, We must think of the malignity of sin. It not only declines to go God's way, but it violently antagonizes all who do so.

Think of the malignity of sin against all that is good. Look out over the world's life and see how sin is battling against the powers of good everywhere. How busy it is, how tireless, how sleepless, how vehement, how persistent in its opposition to all that is good. Waken a

good impulse in some human heart, and you rouse all the evil passions of that heart to resistance. Win a soul to Christ, and you bring upon it temptations to sin, fiercer and fouler than it ever knew before. Set some good influence at work in the world, and you will excite all the violence of evil against it. Build a Church, and you will goad to fury all the "rulers of the darkness of this world." Do any good deed, interest yourself in the victims of gross forms of sin, inaugurate any plan for the elevation of the human race, make a definite effort to build up your own spiritual life, and you will soon find out the malignity of sin. You will learn how determined, how violent, how savage is its opposition to all that is good.

Think of the malignity of sin against the human race. It has always been jealous of human happiness. When God had made man in his own image, and placed him in Paradise, and bade him enjoy its perpetual peace and happiness, the malignity of sin was exhibited. With serpentine subtlety it seduced him from his original righteousness, made a great gulf between him and God, ruined the beautiful creation which God had made, and brought endless misery upon the human race. From that day to this it has been busy in God's world, marring, wrecking, ruining human happiness;

going to and fro in the earth, troubling the children of men, and drawing them away from God. There is nothing upon which it does not cast a jealous eye, and lay a destroying hand. It defaces and defiles this fair earth in which we live, converts our cities into sinks of corruption and disease, mars the finest creations of the human mind and hand, corrupts all literature and art, debauches the bodies of men and wastes them away with riotous excess, disturbs the peace of happy homes, embitters the sweetness of human friendship, sets the nations of the earth at war, invades the Church of God and sets up "spiritual wickedness in high places," darkens all human history, and poisons all human life. The old prophecy is being fulfilled in our midst day by day. The human race, the seed of the woman, has bruised the serpent's head, and the old serpent of sin is bruising his heel. There is undying enmity between the two.

But that prophecy has had a more complete and awful fulfillment than that which it finds in the human race. When the Son of God "for us men and for our salvation came down from Heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man," He drew upon himself the whole fury of the serpent's wrath. He by his Cross and Passion

bruised the serpent's head, but the serpent bruised His heel. Sin could not hurt His head, His divinity; but it struck its cruel fangs deep into His heel, His sacred humanity.

Consider the malignity of sin against the Saviour of the world. It crowded Him out of the inn at Bethlehem, sought the life of the Young Child to destroy Him, drove Him down into Egypt and back to humble Nazareth, cut off the head of His chosen messenger, pursued Him into the wilderness, murmured and plotted against Him all through His ministry, denied His teachings and miracles, filled His followers with nameless fears and set them at variance among themselves, betrayed Him to His enemies, falsely condemned Him, scourged Him, spit in His face, crowned Him with thorns, crucified Him, mocked Him as he hung upon the Cross, set a watch over His grave, denied His resurrection, did its best to destroy His followers off the face of the earth, has never ceased to persecute His Church, wages ceaseless warfare even in its defeat. Such has been the malignity of sin against the Head of the human race. It recognised His holiness, felt instinctively His power, and knew Him as its conqueror. This knowledge goaded it to ungovernable fury, and drove it on to do its worst upon Him.

Sin has no mercy upon either friend or foe.

Towards those who resist it, it is unyielding, implacable, remorseless. Towards those who yield to it, it is more cruel still. How cunningly it lures them on! How skilfully it smooths their path and calms their fears! How insatiable it is in its demands! How it dupes its wretched votaries, until there comes the evil day when it is established in the heart, and its disguise is thrown off, and "at last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder." Go to the saloon, go to the brothel, go to the jail, and see how sin treats its victims, how it rewards them for their obedience, how it blasts, and blackens, and embitters their lives, and then you will begin to realize something of its terrible malignity. Take up the Gospels and read the story of the demoniacs of Gadara, and you will witness the legitimate results of sin in the heart of man.

You have seen to-day something of the awful malignity of sin, of all sin, of your sin. The sin which lurks in your heart is in its essence, and will be in its results, the same as that which crucified your Lord. The sin which knocks so gently at your door, which is creeping so softly into your life, which seems so harmless now, will prove just as deceptive, exacting, and cruel towards you as it has always been to your fellowmen. It will never rest until it has

corrupted, conquered, enslaved you. And when you have become its slave it will make hell in your heart.

Take home to yourself, then, this warning to-day. Remember the malignity of sin. Recognise its foulness, under however fair an exterior. Resist its encroachments with all your might. Master it before it masters you.

FIFTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Sin.

SATURDAY.

THE MYSTERY OF GODLINESS.

“Without controversy great is the Mystery of Godliness.”—
I. St. Timothy iii. 16.

WE have been busy thus far this week trying to realize something of the Mystery of Iniquity. We have seen the activity, the deceitfulness, the lawlessness, the malignity of sin. We have seen “the rulers of the darkness of this world” working craftily together under the leadership of satan to win men away from God, stubbornly combating all the good that is in the world, furiously raging against the Incarnate Son of God and all who follow Him. We have felt forced to cry out, Great is the power, great is the Mystery of Iniquity.

But there is a still greater mystery, the Mystery of Godliness. When we are seized with fear and trembling at the thought of the evil

that is in the world, we may comfort ourselves with the assurance that sin is a vanquished enemy. However aggressive and insolent it may be, its power is broken; it can have no power over us at all except what we permit it to have. Christ wrestled with sin on the Cross, triumphed over it, inflicted upon it a complete and crushing defeat, and put it forever underneath His feet. His struggle and his victory are alike a mystery. We cannot enter into the deeper experiences of His passion. We can only vaguely comprehend the methods of His spiritual warfare. It is one of the great Christian mysteries whose bottomless depths cannot be fathomed by the mind of man. But it is an accomplished fact, the central fact of human history, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Darkness may hide the battle from our sight, as it hid the Suffering Body from the eyes of those who gathered round the Cross, but the light that broke again on Calvary revealed the glorious eternal truth that the Lamb of God had taken away the sins of the world. That blessed light shall never cease to shine, however earth-born clouds may darken it. That truth shall never fail.

Sin is conquered, man is free,
Christ has won the victory.

Great is the Mystery of Godliness in the vic-

tory of the Cross, and hardly less great is it in the experience of each human heart. The battle of the Cross has to be fought over again in its lesser and humbler way in every life. It is a mysterious conflict, more real, more momentous, more supernatural than we are wont to realize. It is a spiritual combat in which we wrestle not so much against flesh and blood, as against principalities and powers of evil angels, against the living embodiments of wickedness. In the silence and secrecy of our hearts the battle goes ever on, unseen, often unknown by the world, but very real, very awful, and full of destiny. The craft and cunning of our enemies make it always an anxious struggle, full of chances of defeat. They are spiritual, invisible; they never tire, they never sleep. It is only by spiritual weapons that they can be overcome. It is only by ceaseless vigilance that they can be held in check. There is but one armour which can equip the Christian soul. The old weapons of the warfare of Christ have not changed; they have not grown clumsy and out of date. The wisdom of the ages has invented none better. The dint of past conflict which they bear only assures us of their power to repel our present foes. The girdle of truth and sincerity, the breastplate of the righteousness of Christ, the firm-shod sandals of the gospel of

peace, the sheltering helmet of the hope of salvation, and, above all, the broad, well-rounded, and brightly polished shield of the Catholic Faith, these constitute the only safe armour for the human soul. These are able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. Having put on the whole armour, the panoply of God, we shall be able to withstand in the evil day when we are beset by the hosts of sin, and having done all to stand undismayed while the battle rages fiercely round.¹

But we are not left to our own devices in our warfare against sin. In order to confront our spiritual foes we need the help of spiritual forces readier and more mighty than they. God has provided us with such help.

1. Over against the evil angels of satan are arrayed the good angels of God, more and mightier than they. Ceaselessly and tirelessly to and fro they go to carry on the far-reaching works of God. The unseen universe is filled with their busy life. On every Christian soul they wait, over every Christian life they watch, as those who must give account to God of their ministries among men. The sight of them in all their purity and power would strike us to the ground. They are our defenders in the hard-fought fight, a vast cloud of witnesses who

¹ *Ephes. vi. 11-17.*

hover o'er the battle-field of human life, ready to lend a hand in time of need, mighty to save us from the hosts of sin.

2. But we have something still better than this, an ever-present divine help in time of need. The Holy Spirit, who sanctifieth us and all the people of God, is at work in the world. He toileth tirelessly in human souls. He resisteth mightily the assaults of sin upon the human heart. He is the divine, omnipotent Protector of every soul. We are not left comfortless before the Mystery of Iniquity, to fight out a lonely battle within ourselves as best we may in our own puny strength. When our Blessed Lord ascended into Heaven He did not leave us to our foes. He united with His Father in sending us another Comforter, another Champion, who should be our defense against all our enemies. The first great work which he promised that the Holy Spirit should do was to "reprove the world of sin," to combat the powers of evil in the world, and ultimately to root them out. This blessed work He is now carrying on. Day by day the enemies of the Cross of Christ are being beaten back and the domain of sin is being narrowed down. We need have no fear of the final result. The armies of God will prevail, the Divine Comforter will fulfill His blessed task, and the

Mystery of Iniquity will be swallowed up in the Mystery of Godliness. The operation of the Holy Ghost is a great mystery, but it is one of the chief certainties of the Christian Faith, upon which we can depend with absolute confidence.

Let us then take courage in our warfare against sin, and give thanks to God for having sent His holy angels and His Holy Ghost "to succour and defend us on earth," while our Saviour pleads for us before the Throne of Heaven.

SIXTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Suffering.

MONDAY.

BETRAYAL.

“See that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.”—*Hebrews viii. 5.*

God laid this injunction on Moses, when he was about to make a tabernacle where men might meet Him in the wilderness. He seems to lay it upon us in a still more solemn way to-day. We have been thus far during Lent learning how to strive for the mastery over self, over satan, over the world, over adversity, over sin. We have yet to learn how to gain the mastery over suffering and death. In this sacred study there is but one Great Teacher to whom we can turn, there is no other school like the School of Calvary. Henceforth in our striving after the mastery, we must see that we make all things after the pattern shewed us in the mount. During the rest of this holy tide,

we must determine to know nothing but Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Let us gather closely round our Suffering Lord, and learn of Him, withdrawing further from the world than we have done thus far, and hiding ourselves with Him in God.

First let us go to Gethsemane. It is past midnight. Through the gnarled trunks and pale green foliage of the olive trees, the full paschal moon is shining, chequering the scene with moving masses of light and shade. Prone upon the ground in one of the more secluded recesses of the garden, lies a human form convulsed with an agony of grief. About a stone's throw from the Sufferer, lie three men asleep. Along the dusty road, not far from the garden gate, moves a black mass of men, armed with swords and staves. The stillness is rudely broken by the red glare of their torches, and the clashing of their arms. At their head moves a familiar form. He enters at the gate and approaches the Sufferer, now risen from the ground and awaiting him with calm and awful dignity. He flings himself upon His neck, sobbing "Master, Master," and kisses Him again and again. "The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."

Earlier in this same fateful night the Sufferer has with deep emotion warned this man, His

chosen disciple, that he is about to betray Him. Only a few moments ago His human soul was wrung with grief at the thought of that which was to come. But now He is serene, untroubled, benignant. How sharply those false kisses stung His cheek, we cannot guess. How deep was the wound in His tender heart, we, with our duller sensibilities, can never know. "It is not an open enemy that hath done Me this dishonour, for then I could have borne it; neither was it mine adversary that did magnify himself against me, for then, peradventure, I would have hid myself from him; but it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend. We took sweet counsel together, and walked in the house of God as friends." ¹ So the Sufferer seems to say within Himself, but He does not add the curse of David, "Let death come hastily upon him, and let him go down quick into hell." ² He makes, instead, one last pathetic appeal, "Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" to wake him to repentance, if it were possible. Beyond this, there is not a word of blame. His appeal is simply this, "Judge thyself, that thou be not judged." And then He gives Himself into the hands of His enemies. "He will not strive nor cry, neither shall any man hear His

¹ Psalm lv. 13-15.² Psalm lv. 16.

voice in the streets.”¹ He is a patient, silent sufferer. He will not complain, nor condemn, nor curse, though one of His beloved disciples has betrayed Him, and all the rest have forsaken Him and fled. He will bury His grief in His own heart, and speak only to heal and to bless.

Here is our Divine Ensample, then, to teach us how to bear such betrayals as may fall to our lot. When friends fail, and we find that our surest confidence has been misplaced, and we are plunged into the sharp agony which the discovery of human faithlessness brings home to the heart, what shall we do? Do as Jesus did. Speak not one word but such as He spoke. Warn the betrayer, if it be not too late, of the awful nature of his act; plead with him to remedy the evil, if he can, not so much for our sake as for his own. And then suffer in silence, giving ourselves up entirely into God's hands. If it seems to Him good, He can send “more than twelve legions of angels” to rescue us from the hands that are stretched out to smite us. If he does not, then we may be quite sure that in God's book it is written of us, as it was of the sinless Sufferer, “that thus it must be.”² Our agony of betrayal, great though it may seem to us, will be but slight compared with

¹ St. Matt. xii. 19.

² St. Matt. xxvi. 53, 54.

His, and we have His splendid example to show us how to master it. Like Him, let us meet it with uncomplaining reliance upon God.

One thought more. How did the human soul of our Lord gain the strength to meet this great crisis of His earthly life? When He stepped forth from the shadows of the garden into the moonlight there was about Him a sense of sublime confidence, a kingly majesty, which scared the lookers-on, and smote the soldiers to the ground, and made Him the commanding figure of the group. His disciples, who in the garden had slumbered and slept, were blinded and alarmed. But their Master stood undismayed in the presence of His enemies, and calmly suffered Himself to be led into what He knew to be the Valley of the Shadow of Death. What was it that made the difference? What was the source of His splendid strength in that awful hour? The reply is plain. He had prayed in Gethsemane, and He came forth in the power of prayer. It shone in His face, it spoke in the tones of His voice, it surrounded Him with an atmosphere of sanctity, it made Him a king among men. It was as the Lion of the tribe of Judah that He came out to confront His enemies.

A life of prayer will do the same for us. Communion with God, fervent prayer made

without ceasing, and deepened into agonizing earnestness as the time of trial draws nigh, this is the only discipline which will strengthen us to endure the faithlessness of man. It is the only thing that will enable us to meet our betrayers as our blessed Master did. If we would make all things after the pattern shown us by Him upon the mount, we must first go with Him to Gethsemane.

SIXTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Suffering.

TUESDAY.

MISJUDGMENT.

“He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth: He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment.”—*Isaiah liii. 7, 8.*

To what an awful extent were these words fulfilled in the suffering life of our Lord! When “He was numbered with the transgressors,” the overflowing fullness of human misjudgment was emptied out upon Him.

Consider first the misjudgments of His early life and ministry. The dark cloud of human injustice hung over Him from the first. Men whispered charges of impurity against the spotless Virgin Mother who brought Him into the world. They openly ridiculed His humble origin. “Can any good come out of Naza-

reth?"¹ "Is not this the carpenter's son?"² The fanatical Scribes and Pharisees cried out, "Behold a man gluttonous, and a wine-bibber, a friend of publicans and sinners."³ When He worked mighty miracles, they refused to give God the glory. "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils."⁴ The stupid, sodden indifference of the worldly world forced Him to cry out against it, "O, faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?"⁵ The gross incapacity even of His chosen followers to grasp the true greatness of His character and work wrung from Him the complaint, "O, fools and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken."⁶ Consider the constant heavy load of blind, ignorant, prejudiced misjudgment which He had to bear, and try to realize the splendid patience with which He carried it through life and down to the grave.

Dwell next in thought upon the misjudgment of Caiaphas, and try to think how terribly the sensitive human soul of our Lord must have suffered in the palace of that false and cruel High Priest. When under cover of night, and

¹ St. John i. 46.

⁴ St. Matt. xii. 24.

² St. Matt. xiii. 55.

⁵ St. Matt. xvii. 17.

³ St. Matt. xi. 19.

⁶ St. Luke xxiv. 25.

by the help of base treachery, he dragged the Sufferer into that corrupt court which he thus made forever infamous, to inflict upon Him without a shred of evidence a sentence which had been determined long before, he showed the world what awful depths of wickedness there are in man. What that mock trial, with its shameful travesties of justice, its fierce outbursts of envy, hatred, and malice, and its cruel indignities—what that trial was to Him we can but dimly comprehend. For the Only-begotten Son of God to be put on trial by His own High Priest, and condemned as a common criminal by the rulers of His own peculiar people, was an indignity too deep for human thought to fathom it. But how did our Divine Example receive the injustice which was heaped upon Him? Except for a brief refusal to testify before such a court, He kept still silence. While false witnesses annihilated each other's testimony, when a minion of the court struck Him in the face, while the High Priest raged upon his throne, He held His peace until at last the time came for Him to speak. Then, at length, not before that corrupt court, but in the great audience of the universe, did He open His mouth and confess Himself the Son of God. He would not speak one word to save Himself from the sentence which hung over

Him, but under the most solemn oath He declared Himself the divine Judge of all the earth. He met the sentence of Caiaphas by an appeal to a Higher Court.

Think next of the misjudgment of Herod. When that dissolute monarch saw Jesus led into the gloomy palace where he was idling away the Passover time, "He was exceeding glad, for he was desirous to see Him of a long season, because he had heard many things of Him, and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by Him." ¹ He instantly forgot his responsibility as a judge in the interest of a new and exciting experience. He received the Prisoner graciously, questioned Him at great length, and no doubt urged Him to work a miracle then and there. But not one word would the Majestic Sufferer vouchsafe to the vile, hardened criminal who sat upon his kingly throne. There was not a spark of conscience left in Herod to which he could appeal. Had there been, this painful silence would have been the mightiest appeal that could be made. Before such a tribunal, our Lord would not open His mouth. He was silent that the voice of John the Baptist might be heard crying from the grave.

Finally, let us consider the misjudgment of Pontius Pilate. As we trace his proceedings,

¹ St. Luke xxiii. 8.

step by step, we find that his whole course, while the Sufferer was in his hands, was one of low, worldly policy. The merits of the case were plain enough to his practised eye. He declared over and over again, "I find no fault in Him at all." The Passion of our Blessed Lord has been described as a touchstone of character, revealing the secrets of all hearts which came within its reach. When Pilate was put to the test, it showed his utter lack of principle, and made him for all time the awful example of an unjust judge. Let us try for a moment to realize what it must have been for our Lord, with His keen sense of truth and right, to feel Himself in such hands. How deep for Him must have been the humiliation of being made a victim of Pilate's wretched policy of expediency, dragged to and fro in chains, subjected to the coarse insults of the cruel soldiery, His sacred body lacerated by scourges and the crown of thorns, and finally given up to death at the demand of a bloodthirsty mob. And all this, while His judge openly proclaimed His innocence.

Let us learn from our Lord's majestic silence and self-control in this last stage of His trial, as in all the rest, a lesson for the conduct of our own life. We shall have to meet the same forms of misjudgment which he endured. We

shall encounter the misjudgment of pride and prejudice, as embodied in Caiaphas; of the curious cynical world, as in Herod; of weak, worldly policy which dare not champion the right, as in Pilate. Let us meet them with the same silent dignity, the same uncomplaining patience, and the same steadfast trust in God, as the Great Sufferer did.

SIXTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Suffering.

WEDNESDAY.

POVERTY.

“Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.”—*II. Cor. viii. 9.*

Do we indeed know this? Have we realized the extreme poverty in which the Son of God dwelt upon earth? Let us meditate upon it to-day.

Take His early life. Begun in a stable among beasts of the stall; its infancy deprived of a home and driven into a foreign land; thrust aside into the obscurity of Nazareth and the humble toil of a carpenter's shop; shorn of all the advantages and opportunities which the world deems desirable for childhood and youth, it was from the first a life of absolute poverty. Beyond the companionship of a few loving souls, bound to Him by the ties of human relationship,

the Holy Child Jesus had nothing to satisfy the cravings of His humanity. He went to the last extremity of want, and yet how rich His life was in itself. It needed not anything which this world had to give.

Take His public life. He had absolutely none of those things which the world holds dear. He had no longer any home. "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." ¹ He had no worldly wealth. The bag which held the scanty alms which bought His daily bread was held by a thief. The garments which sheltered the sacred form were not bought with a price, but made and given by some generous, loving hand. The days and nights were full of toil which brought no reward in this world. He sat sometimes at the tables of the rich, but only by sufferance, as a guest. His intercourse was chiefly with the poor and destitute. The only record which identifies Him with the rich is, "He made His grave with the rich in His death." ² The life of Christ in the world was the most poverty-stricken of all lives. When He came to the end of it, there was not in all the wide world one thing which *as man* He could call His own, except the Cross on which He hung.

¹ St. Matt. viii. 20.

² Isaiah liii. 9.

It may be said that this was in accordance with His own desires, that He had not sought for worldly goods but for souls. It was for them that He had come, and toiled, and bled, and was to die. They were His wealth. Yes, it is true. But out of all the world how many of them had He won? Abraham hoped to find fifty men in Sodom like-minded with himself, for whose sake the city should be saved. Elijah had his seven thousand in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal, and his hundred prophets of the Lord, hidden in a cave. But hear the Son of Man counting up His wealth of souls on the last night of His ministry. "Father, the hour is come. I have manifested Thy Name unto the men which Thou gavest me out of the world ; Thine they were, and Thou gavest them me ; and they have kept Thy word. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own Name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy Name. Those that Thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition." ¹ How many souls were there whom He could call His own? Twelve human souls given Him by His Father out of

¹ St. John xvii. 1, 6, 11, 12.

all the millions of living men, and one of them has become a devil and is lost! Beside them a little band of timid, bewildered, half-believing disciples, a few holy women, and that is all. Here are summed up the entire results of His ministry among men, here is His whole harvest of souls. How few, how pitifully, awfully few! O the depth of the poverty of the Son of Man, even in that which held most dear!

It has always been so. It is so still. How terribly few out of all mankind, since Christ was lifted up upon the Cross, have been drawn unto Him! Our loving Lord is still poor. It is but a scanty harvest of souls which His hired servants have gleaned in the field of the world. There is many a sheep that is lost from the Good Shepherd's fold and has not been found.

The lesson which we learn from the Great Sufferer to-day is the blessedness of poverty, and a hard lesson it is. Do we find it so? Do we feel that God has given us very little in this world? Do we see others, who are not serving Him, who have enough and to spare? Do we have to practice economy, deny ourselves, incur the scornful pity of the world? Do we feel that, after all, the results of our life are pitifully small, that "we have toiled all the night and taken nothing," that our life is almost a failure? Then let us learn from the poverty of the Son

of Man to be content with what God permits us to do and to have. We cannot always make a true estimate of our accomplishments in this world. They may prove greater than we think, when we see them in the light of the Great Judgment Day. If they do not, they will at least be greater than we had any right to ask or expect. "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord."¹

Christian poverty is a blessing in disguise. While we meditate upon it and try to receive it as we ought, let us see that we make our poverty after the pattern shewed us in the mount. His was a voluntary poverty which He chose of His own free will and accord. He deliberately made Himself poor in this world that He might be rich in the next. Even so, poverty, welcomed and embraced for Christ's sake, would be for us the truest wealth. He made Himself poor in this world that He might enrich all human life. Poverty had no power to thwart the great work which He had come to do. His life, His teachings, His kingdom did not fail because of His poverty. They really profited by it. It will be so with us. Poverty, borne not grudgingly and of necessity, but welcomed as the will of God for us, or brought upon ourselves in the effort to make others rich, is bound

¹ St. Matt. x. 25.

to be a state of great blessedness. Thrice blessed is that glorious poverty which some have brought upon themselves in the generous expenditure of their worldly goods for the saving of human souls. What better thing can be said of any of us at the end of life than this: "He made Himself poor, but He made others rich, rich with the unsearchable riches of Christ."

SIXTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Suffering.

THURSDAY.

BODILY SUFFERING.

“The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it, but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores; they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.”
—*Isaiah i. 5, 6.*

TO-DAY let the Chief Sufferer teach us how all bodily suffering should be borne. We may pass hastily over the toils and trials of His early life and ministry, the flight into Egypt, the hunger and thirst, the weary journeyings to and fro, the watchings and fastings, the unremitting toil. We may pass over these and come at once to the last Holy Week of His earthly ministry. We shall find enough and more than enough of bodily suffering in that.

It is an awful thing to see how truly the Son of Man could say of Himself, “There is no

whole part in My body," † how every member of His human frame shared in His sufferings.

Consider. His sacred head was crowned with cruel thorns in mockery of His kingly claims. Upon His brow were gathered great drops of bloody sweat, showing how His body shared in the agony of His soul. His eyes were tortured by the sight of His executioners, the grief and desertion of His followers, the fanatic fury of His murderers. They were scorched by bitter tears. His ears were deafened by the horrid din of denials, mockeries, and false accusations which followed Him even to the Cross and clamoured round Him there. His cheeks were stung with shameful blows, and drenched with spittle from the coarse mouths of the soldiery. His lips were defiled by a traitor's kiss, and rudely struck by a minion of the High Priest's court. His tongue was parched with thirst, they gave Him gall and vinegar to drink. His shoulders were lacerated by the scourge and bruised by the heavy cross. His side was pierced with a spear. Rough nails were driven through the delicate nerves of His hands and feet. He died of a broken heart. His whole body was so bruised and torn that you might "tell all His bones." "From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness

† Psalm xxxviii. 7.

in it." And to the description of His wounds we may add the prophet's words, "They have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment." It was an awful aggravation of His bodily suffering that there was no gentle loving hand to dress His wounds. He seemed forsaken by God and man in the time of His sorest need.

We need no more to convince us that our Blessed Lord was the Chief of Sufferers. His capacity for suffering was far beyond that of any of the children of men. None of us can ever suffer so keenly as He could. Nor will any of us ever be called upon to endure such a list of tortures as that which we have just enumerated. Some of us will have pains and sufferings arising from the weakness of our flesh, and a few will have insulting blows as a part of our discipline. But even at the worst our bodily sufferings will be but slight compared with His. It will never be possible for us to say with such literal truth as did He, that there is no whole part in our body. Nor will any of our sufferings be so undeserved as His. Ours are but seldom brought upon us by the injustice or malignity of enemies. They are generally only the inevitable results of our own folly and self-indulgence and sin. If we would confess the truth, we should cry out as did the penitent thief upon the cross,

“We indeed justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds, but this man hath done nothing amiss.”¹ In all respects then, in extent, in intensity, and in brutality, “our light affliction which is but for a moment” is not to be compared with His deeper sufferings. We can only follow Him a little way into the hidden depths of His suffering life. But if we are to be made like unto Him, we must take those few steps, and must see that they are planted in the way where Christ has gone before.

How then shall we bear the fewer and lighter bodily sufferings which may fall to our lot? Let us look upon the Great Sufferer, and see how He bears Himself amidst the most unmerited injuries and excruciating pains. We find Him absolute master of Himself. He does not shrink from the scourge, or the crown of thorns, or even from the Cross. He makes no protest against the injustice and cruelty of His persecutors. He utters not one word of complaint throughout the whole long tragedy of suffering. He seems all along to be saying within Himself, “I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how am I straitened until it be accomplished!”² The quenchless light of a great purpose shines in His eyes. His face is benignant, radiant with unbroken peace and serenity. His lips are opened

¹ St. Luke xxiii. 41.

² St. Luke xii. 50.

only to warn and to bless. His whole body, even when smarting under the lash and quivering on the Cross, is under a sublime self-control. It suffers in every part, but the tireless patience of the Great Sufferer supports Him to the bitter end. There is one splendid fact which enables Him to endure all things, even that eternal truth which He had asserted long before, "I and my Father are one."

Here is our great lesson then. It was the serene consciousness of unbroken union with the Father, which lifted Him aloft and enabled Him to endure as seeing Him who is invisible. This was the secret of His strength. Just so it is the assurance of union with Christ in His sufferings which will support us in the hour of mortal grief and pain. To take our sufferings and unite them with those of Christ, and offer them to God with His, is to sweeten and sanctify them and take away all in them that was terrible. If borne with patience for Christ's sake, with devout recollection of those greater pains which He endured for us, our bodily afflictions will work no harm to our souls, but will only conform us closer to our suffering Lord. St. Peter urges this truth upon his converts with convincing force in words which we ought never to forget. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as

though some strange thing happened unto you. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." ¹

¹ I St. Peter iv. 12, 13.

SIXTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Suffering.

FRIDAY.

MENTAL SUFFERING.

“My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.”—*St. Matt. xxvi. 38.*

WHILE we recognize the greatness of the bodily sufferings of our Blessed Lord, we must remember that in the garden, in the judgment hall, and on the Cross they were exceeded by the sufferings of His soul. Perhaps the bodily sufferings appeal more directly to us and seem the more shameful to our minds, but evidently to Him they were not so. His severest, cruellest agony was of the mind and heart. There is abundant evidence that He was sometimes so absorbed in the travail of His soul as to be almost unconscious of physical pain.

To-day let us try to think what it was which made His soul so exceeding sorrowful.

1. The ingratitude of men. There were so many who had heard His gracious words, so

few who believed in Him. Out of all that wide, wicked world, which He was dying to save, there were so few who acknowledged what He was doing for them, so many who would not come to Him that they might have life. The great stupid, sodden, sinful world held blindly on its way, unmindful of its Saviour's tears, and pains, and death. Even "His own," the few faithful souls who loved Him and had clung to Him, were now amongst the chief causes of His grief. Judas had betrayed Him, Peter had denied Him, and all the rest had deserted Him and fled. All but one of them would return to Him again, and none of them would be lost save the son of perdition. But for vast multitudes of living men His sufferings and death would be in vain. His soul was torn with an awful sense of the loss of souls by their own blindness and unbelief.

2. He felt also the scorn of men. It dogged His footsteps everywhere He went, opposed Him all through His ministry, clamoured for His life before the judgment seat, and culminated round His Cross. As we look on, it seems to us a strange and almost incomprehensibly cruel thing that men could thus scorn their Saviour and their God. We shudder at the sight. But what must it have been to Him! How sharply must every hateful act and word of scorn have

stung His tender heart! How deeply must His kingly soul have resented every insult which was aimed at Him! The mind of man cannot fathom the mind of Christ, nor can we probe the wounds inflicted in it by the scorn of men. But we can comprehend enough of them to overwhelm us with shame and horror at the desperate wickedness which could inflict such cruel wounds upon the heart of our loving Lord.

3. Consider, too, how our Sinless Saviour suffered from contact with sin. What was it that made the agony of Gethsemane so intense? It was sin, the sins of the whole world, the great black mass of human sinfulness which loomed so large as to darken the whole horizon of His mind. The time had come for Him to take upon Him the iniquity of us all. But if He was to take away the sins of the world, He must touch them, they must come home to Him, He must feel the weight of them. This close contact with sin was one of the things which made him so exceeding sorrowful in Gethsemane.

Even to us, with our hardened hearts, the sight of gross and sensual sin is terrible; we shudder and shrink away from it. But what must it have been to His pure eyes and spotless soul? Sin was unspeakably hateful to

Him, His soul recoiled violently from its presence, and suffered keenly so long as it was in sight. No wonder then that when the accumulated wickedness of our fallen race, from the sin of the first Adam down to the last crime which shall be committed to the end of time, when this mighty mass of evil gathered itself up and fell with its full weight upon Him, no wonder that it crushed Him to the earth. No wonder that as he felt Himself enveloped in its loathsome embrace, "His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." ¹ It is not strange that as he looked into the depths of the bitter cup of human iniquity He cried in agony, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." ² But it was not possible. God had put it to His lips, and He drank it to the dregs.

4. Finally, let us think of the suffering which was involved in His separation from God. He hung upon the Cross as the Lamb of God which was to take away the sin of the world, the Second Adam in whom were summed up the destinies of the human race. His sacred humanity was in the closest relationship with mankind. But mankind was deep sunk in sin, had corrupted itself, and was in rebellion against God. If He was to be identified with

¹ St. Luke xxii. 44.

² St. Matt. xxvi. 36.

it, to be its representative, it was inevitable that His human nature must feel the weight of God's displeasure against sin. The dark shadows of sin must gather round His human soul, and while he bears the burden of a world's sins He must feel the terrible desolation of a soul that is cut off from God. "He made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin."¹

This it was, as we may reverently think, which drew from Him that horror-stricken cry, the most appalling sound ever heard by the ears of man, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken Me?" His human soul had thus far dwelt in the light of the Father's countenance, but now "God made as though He heard Him not," and He "become like them that go down into the pit."²

Such were some of the chief things which our Lord suffered in His soul. In proportion as we are Christlike, shall we comprehend these sufferings, and shall they be laid upon us. Thus we may judge ourselves, that we be not judged of God. Let us ask ourselves to-day what is our estimate of sin. Can we look upon it with composure? Do we suffer at the sight of it? Does the consciousness of the world's sin burden our souls, and distress us as it did our righteous Lord? Do we feel the weight of the

¹ II. Cor. v. 21.

² Psalm xxviii. 1.

sins of our lost race resting heavily upon our hearts, and making a great gulf between God and man? Are we sensitive to sin or not? Here is an unfailing index of our soul's health. Unless we are keenly alive to the terrible havoc which sin has made and is making in God's world, we have not the mind of Christ. Unless we sorrow over the sins of men, and grieve because of our own wickedness, it is not well with our souls.

SIXTH WEEK IN LENT.

The Mastery Over Suffering.

SATURDAY.

THE REWARD OF SUFFERING.

“Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.”—*Phil. i. 8, 9, 10.*

PASSION WEEK is drawing to its close. Day by day we have tried to realize the Passion of our Lord more clearly than before. To-day we may turn to its reward.

How sweet it must have been to Him after the toil, the agony, the Cross—to enter into His reward! How full of restful satisfaction must have been the Sabbath calm in which He awaited the dawn of the great Easter Day! We can measure the sweetness of the rest by the bitterness of the suffering. But how shall we even faintly imagine the blessedness of the reward? How shall we realize the joy of re-

union with the Father in Heaven, the satisfaction of having finished the work His Father had given Him to do, the peace of Paradise following so close upon the horror of Calvary? How imperfectly after all do we grasp the meaning of the old familiar words:

“The strife is o’er, the battle done;
The victory of life is won,
The song of triumph is begun.”

We sing them with some gladness on Easter Day, but do we ever stop to think how much they meant to our Lord and His few faithful followers, how much they ought to mean to us? How shall we estimate the eternal weight of glory which was purchased for them and for us by His sufferings? That glory could never have been reached except through the way of sorrows which He trod. Without the Cross there would have been no crown for the Son of Man. The sufferings of our Lord were the steep and painful steps which led up to the throne of His glory. It was obedience unto death, even the death of the Cross, which gave Him a Name which is above every name.

Let us learn from our Lord’s Passion a lesson for ourselves. We shall have some suffering to bear in this world whether we will or no. But there are two ways in which we may bear it. We may meet it as Christ did, or as the world does.

1. The world regards all suffering as an un-mixed evil. It considers poverty, and pain, and disaster, and death as terrible calamities. It dreads them, shuns them, writhes under their unwelcome weight, and struggles violently to shake them off. It never says: "It is good for me that I have been in trouble,"¹ as David did. It makes no use of suffering, and finds no blessing in it.

2. But the attitude of our divine Lord towards suffering was very different. He gladly gave Himself up to it and bore it patiently and unflinchingly even in its severest forms. He gloried in it as an honourable thing. He sanctified it and offered it up to the Father as something acceptable in His sight.

We may look upon suffering in either of these two lights. We may unite ourselves with the world in our sufferings, or with Christ. But we must remember that there is no promise and no hope attached to the worldly view of suffering. It offers no recompense of reward. It bids its votaries bear their afflictions with as much stoical self-control as they can command in the face of a cruel necessity. But it holds out no hope of reward to him who bears them well.

The Christian view is a much brighter one. It is firmly convinced that every trial bravely

¹ Psalm cxix. 71.

borne will bring its reward, that every suffering united with those of Christ will be acceptable in the sight of God, that every grief may be converted into joy, if welcomed as a part of God's wholesome discipline for the strengthening of our souls. This is true even in the minutest details of our daily life. Even petty trials, if borne in the spirit of Christ, become a means of grace.

"The trivial round, the common task,
Would furnish all we ought to ask;
Room to deny ourselves; a road
To bring us daily nearer God,"¹

Suffering with Christ brings us two great rewards: it is strengthening to the soul, and it unites us to God.

1. It is an educative discipline for our souls. Sorrow and pain have marvellous power to chasten and refine the human heart. There is no strong and lofty character which has not been matured by suffering. It draws out all the latent powers of our being as nothing else can. Everyone needs it for the full development of his character. The highest elevations of moral virtue can only be reached by those who have learned to suffer and be strong. Pain is power. The men of sorrow have always been men of might. The perfect man is the Chief Sufferer who hung upon the Cross.

¹ Keble's Christian Year. Morning Hymn.

2. But the patient endurance of suffering does more than strengthen us, it brings us close to God. It is sorrow rather than joy that warms human sympathy and brings about the fellowship of kindred minds. It is those who have suffered together who know each other best. There is a freemasonry of sorrow which arouses all the noblest sympathies of the soul. The old adage that "Misery loves company," finds its highest fulfilment in the Communion of Saints. In the Household of Faith

" We share our mutual woes,
Our mutual burdens bear,
And often for each other flows
The sympathizing tear."

The power of Christian sympathy is one of the mightiest influences in the world. And we are indebted for it largely to the existence of human suffering.

But suffering does more than unite us to our fellowmen, it draws us close to God. We can come nearer to Christ in our sorrows than in our joys. Indeed we cannot come into close union with Him without suffering. He Himself has said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." ¹ There was so much suffering in His earthly ministry, He was so truly a man of

¹ St. Matt. xvi. 24.

sorrows and acquainted with grief, that we cannot hope to be like Him or to be vitally joined with Him until we have become partakers of His sufferings. The Way of the Cross is the only way to union with God in Christ. Those who walk in it to the end have an exceeding great reward. It was of a countless multitude of such faithful souls whom he saw before the throne of God that St. John the Divine was told, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple, and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." †

† Revelation vii. 14-17.

HOLY WEEK.

The Mastery Over Death.

MONDAY.

WHAT IS DEATH?

“It is appointed unto men once to die.”—*Hebrews ix. 27.*

AMONG all the changes and chances of this mortal life there is one great certainty. There is one event of which, however we may forget it or disguise it, we are sure. We shall die. This is the one great fixed fact of the future. It is not wise nor safe to blind ourselves to it, nor to postpone all thought of it until it comes. We shall have to meet death. Let us prepare to meet and master it. The record of our Lord's death upon the Cross has marvellous power to instruct and comfort us. It can teach us how to convert death into the birthday of immortal life. We have been learning from Him how to live. Let us try this week to learn from Him how to die.

To-day let us ask ourselves what is death,

and what are its results. Death is simply this, the separation of two things which God has joined together, the parting asunder for a time of body and soul. It is not the destruction of either of them. It cannot annihilate my body nor my soul. My body shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day, my soul cannot cease to exist. What happens at death is exactly this—the soul leaves the body, in which it has dwelt as in a tenement, to go for awhile into another sphere of life where it is no longer “in the flesh,” but “in the spirit.” Meantime “my flesh also shall rest in hope,”¹ in hope of that great day when body shall be joined again to soul, and they shall be forever one. Death then is the separation of the body from the soul.

No doubt one of the chief reasons why we dread the approach of death is because it is the great separator. It is natural for us to fear death. It is so mighty, so resistless, so mysterious a power that we cannot think of it without awe, we cannot face it without anxiety. We see it doing its silent work, and we are afraid of it. It takes some fair human body, perhaps in the full vigour of health, perhaps wasted by disease, and separates it from the indwelling soul. It takes human lives and lifts

¹ Psalm xvi. 10.

them out of all the surroundings of which they seemed a part, snatches them away from business, and society, and home, and sets them into a new environment. It breaks short off, sometimes very ruthlessly, the associations, and friendships, and affectionate intercourse of this world, separates families, comes between husband and wife, and converts the life of those who are left into channels which are new and strange. Yes, death is the great separator, and we cannot think of it as such without some sense of dread.

But we shall find comfort in the thought that its separations are only for a time. The soul and body which it has parted asunder shall surely be rejoined for all eternity. The time shall come when death will have no more dominion over them. The kindred souls which have been bound together in this life, but which the cold hand of death has parted for awhile, shall not be kept eternally apart. For it is true that now in the time of this mortal life we are choosing our surroundings and associations for eternity. Those whom we love here and with whom we cast in our lot now will be our companions throughout all the life to come. If we identify ourselves with those who know not God, who care only for this present world, whose influence is downward all the

time, we shall have our place with them forevermore. If we have loved and sought here upon earth the presence of God and the companionship of holy souls, we shall have our portion with them hereafter. It is an almost overpowering thought; the associations and friendships of to-day—we are making them for eternity. If they are good and true and pure, such shall they be forevermore. If they are false and base and contaminating to the soul, we shall be dragged down and enchained by them everlastingly. Our environment after death will be the same which we have chosen for ourselves upon earth. It will be true of us as it was with Judas, each of us will “go to his own place.”¹ To die is to join that innumerable company of departed souls, like-minded with ourselves, with whom our course of life in this world, whether good or evil, has fitted us to dwell eternally. And if some whom we have loved be left behind and lost awhile, they, too, will soon be united with us by death. Let us remember, then, that if death separates, it also unites.

But death is not only a great separator, it is also a great liberator. Think how it sets the soul free.

1. Its bondage to the body is brought to an end by death. Those lower appetites which

¹ Acts i. 25.

strove to enslave and degrade it are forever quenched. That weakness of the flesh which hindered all its higher activities is overcome. All the ills which flesh was heir to can no longer harass and hurt the soul. The long struggle between soul and body for the mastery is ended now. The immortal soul is free, free from the dominion of unruly appetites, free from all carnal claims, free to spend its whole strength in the pursuit of holiness. Like our Lord, we are "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit."¹

2. But more than this. If death finds us at peace with God, it sets the soul free from the assaults of sin. It snatches the soul away out of the reach of sin. After death there shall be no more messengers of satan sent to buffet us, no more warfare against "evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul," no more besetting sins beleaguering the citadel of the soul, no more relentless spiritual foes to be grappled and beaten with heavy blows and brought into subjection, no more danger of falling back into sin. "Our soul is escaped, even as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken and we are delivered."² When through death it entered into life, it died once for all to sin. "The body of sin has been destroyed,

¹ I. St. Peter iii, 18.

² Psalm cxxiv. 6.

that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin." ¹

3. Finally, the soul which has been given to God is set free from suffering at the hour of death. It rests from its labours. For it there is no more toil, no more heavy burdens to be borne, no more weary struggles to keep in the right way. Its disappointments are at an end. For it there are no more withered hopes, nor dreary loneliness, nor voiceless gloom, nor sinking of the heart into dark despair. Its afflictions are forever past. There shall be no more pain, nor persecution, nor bitterness, nor blinding tears, nor farewells, nor cravings unsatisfied, nor iron entering into the soul, nor shall there be any more death. But the soul, unclothed, unfettered, free, shall thenceforth live mightily unto God. Liberated by the hand of death, it has gone

Home to the Holy Land,
Home where no shadows fall,
Home to the golden strand,
Home to the Monarch's Hall,
Home from all risk of harm,
Home to the Land of Rest,
Home to the Father's Arm,
Home to the Saviour's Breast.

¹ Romans vi. 6, 7.

HOLY WEEK.

The Mastery Over Death.

TUESDAY.

OBEDIENCE UNTO DEATH.

“O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”—*I. Cor. xv. 55-57.*

UNTIL our Blessed Lord hung on the Cross there had been none in all the human race who had not felt the sting of death. That great change had been made terrible to them by the sense of sin, by the accusing conscience, by the deep-rooted opposition of their nature to the holy will of God, which made them dread its approach. Down to that time death had reigned over the whole human race as a conqueror. “As by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”¹ There had

¹ Romans v. 12.

been a few who by miraculous powers had been brought back from the grave and restored for a time to life in this world. But none of them had been emancipated from the dominion of death. Some day it would claim them again, and then its victory would be complete. But Christ upon the Cross changed all that. In the perfection of His sinless humanity and in the resistless power of His incarnate Godhead, He met death upon the battleground of the Cross, strove with it for the mastery, and came off conqueror, and more than conqueror. Since then "death is swallowed up in victory." ¹

Let us try during this Holy Week to learn how the victory was won. We have found Jesus in all the other experiences of life the perfect pattern of manliness; we shall find Him on the Cross the divine ensample of a godly life and death. We shall learn from Him how to conquer death.

To-day let us think of the first weapon by which He won His victory. He "humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even unto the death of the cross." ²

"Obedient." Think how much that means. Think of the "Only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God,

¹ I. Cor. xv. 54.

² Phil. ii. 8.

begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father," obedient unto death as though He were the vilest sinner of the whole human race. Think of the Incarnate Son, in whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"¹ "who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth," "bearing our sins in His own body on the tree."² See the Maker and Monarch of all things bowing Himself down to death, humbling Himself even to the death upon the Cross. "Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered."³

It is a splendid thing to see the obedience of our Blessed Lord in the humble home at Nazareth, in the wild wilderness, in the upper room at Jerusalem, in Gethsemane, in every act of that self-sacrificing life in which He "pleased not Himself." But all these shining examples of obedience (bright and beautiful as they are) grow pale before the crowning glory of His obedience unto death. That sublime act of obedience was one of the secrets of His ability to destroy death. "Being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey Him."⁴ Like Samson bowing beneath the pillars of Dagon's house, He bent

¹ Col. ii. 9.

³ Hebrews v. 8.

² I. St. Peter ii. 22-24.

⁴ Hebrews v. 9.

His body to the Cross, bringing upon Himself the crushing weight of the sins of the whole world, but forever breaking the power of man's great adversary, death. It was through His splendid obedience to death as the Son of Man that He was able to triumph as the Son of God. He stands before the world as the divine-human example how to gain the victory over death.

The first great lesson which we learn from the Cross is the lesson of obedience. Let us try to impress it deeply upon our hearts to-day by emphasizing some special features of our Blessed Lord's obedience in the hour of death.

1. First, let us remember that it was a purely voluntary obedience. There was no element of compulsion about His death. His sinless humanity was not subject to the sentence of death which had fallen upon all those who were conceived and born in sin. Death had no right to claim Him for its own. His life was entirely in His own hands. He did not hesitate to assert this in the plainest terms. "I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."¹ In the exercise of this sovereign control over His own life, and at the same time of a glad and ready obedience to His

¹ St. John x. 17-18.

Father's will, He submitted Himself to the embrace of death, which otherwise could have had no power over Him at all. "He bowed His head and gave up the ghost." It was the bowed head that gave permission to the powers of death to advance and take His sacred Body into their grasp. The bowed head of our Saviour on the Cross is God's revelation to the world of the duty of implicit obedience to the divine will.

2. But we must notice not only the willingness, but the completeness of our Blessed Lord's obedience. His submission and self-sacrifice knew no bounds. They were perfect at every point, and of limitless extent. He was obedient unto death, that is, even up to death. His obedience did not stop short of the utmost boundaries of His being; it included all His energies, and even the remotest event of His earthly ministry; it extended even to the death of the Cross. In scope and depth it was infinite.

3. Finally, let us remember that it was an effective obedience. It robbed death of its sting and deprived the grave of its victory. The sting of death is sin and the victory of the grave is corruption. But for Him who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth; who had power to take His life again; who was only

resigning His body into the hands of death for a time, that He might fulfill all righteousness, the terrors of death were reduced to their lowest terms. It might sunder His body from His soul, but only during His pleasure. It might separate the Great Shepherd from His little flock, but only for a few days. It might seem to triumph over Him, but the real victory lay with Himself. His great glad act of obedience was destined to be the

“Death of death, and hell’s destruction.”

And so even in the hour of death His human soul was soothed and sustained by the consciousness of victory.

Let us plant deeply in our hearts to-day the comforting assurance that by such obedience as His, we, too, may gain the mastery over death. When we have put ourselves entirely into the strong and loving hands of God, and determined to let His Will be done, we have conquered death. It cannot touch us until God wills, and even then it can have no real dominion over us. For the Son of Man has sovereign power over death, and has said of Himself, “I am He that liveth and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.”¹

¹ Rev. i. 18.

HOLY WEEK.

The Mastery Over Death.

WEDNESDAY.

LOVE STRONGER THAN DEATH.

“When Jesus knew that His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.”—*St. John xiii. 1.*

WHILE we gather as devout learners round our Saviour's Cross, there is something else for us to do besides observing His sufferings. Let us try to-day to enter into the mind of Christ, and learn how He was occupied upon the Cross. Let us strive to realize some of the thoughts which passed through His mind in those last hours of His ministry among men. The words spoken from the Cross will give us some insight into the thoughts of His heart and show us how our minds should be occupied in the hour of death.

Of whom, then, did our Lord think while He hung upon the Cross ? Were his thoughts turned in upon Himself ? He was the central figure in the world's history, on Him hung the destinies of the whole human race, He was engaged in a tremendous effort for the redemption of a lost world, He was the Mediator (and the only possible mediator) between God and man. It would not have been strange if His thoughts had been centered upon Himself and wholly occupied with the great transaction in which He was engaged.

But evidently it was not so. Throughout that Holy Week He had seemed to be always thinking of others rather than Himself. Looking down from the brow of Olivet, He had wept over the Holy City which He loved. Led forth from the High Priest's Palace, He had rescued His perjured disciple by a look. Through all the weary hours when He had been dragged to and fro at the caprice of an unjust judge, He had borne Himself with a majestic dignity which seemed hardly conscious of self; He had seemed not to be absorbed in His sufferings, but in the thought of the souls whom He had come to save. As He crept feebly along the way of sorrows, sinking beneath the crushing burden of His Cross, He had spoken words of compassion for the daughters of Jerusalem.

And now, as He hung upon the cruel Cross, His first and foremost thoughts were not for Himself, but for His fellowmen. Let us trace them one by one as they are betrayed to us by His words.

Close round the foot of the Cross is gathered a group of rude soldiery, busy with their ghastly work. They have crucified Him and now they are casting lots for His seamless robe. The first thought of the Divine Martyr is for them. His first words from the Cross are a prayer for His executioners. Looking down upon them with infinite tenderness, He breaks the awful silence with these blessed words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."¹

By His side upon another cross there hangs a thief. As this unhappy man looks into the face of death, he sees how vile he was. As he gazes with growing wonder at his Fellow-sufferer, and sees with what silent uncomplaining majesty He endures the Cross, some glimmering intelligence of His sovereign power and Messiahship dawns upon his mind. His heart is flooded with a rush of penitence, and sympathy, and sublime faith. His lips falter this trembling prayer, "Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom." Prompt and powerful is the reply: "Verily I say unto thee,

¹ St. Luke xviii. 34.

to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." ¹ Again we find our Lord thinking not of Himself, but of the repentant robber by His side.

Amidst the vast and restless crowd which surges round our Saviour's Cross there are many enemies, and but few friends. These last have pressed bravely forward and drawn as close as possible to the lonely Sufferer. They are watching with Him to the bitter end. As He looks round Him, He sees His Beloved Disciple standing near, with a familiar figure by his side. It is a woman, well stricken in years, and bowed with grief. It is His mother. The same faithful form which bent over the cradle of His human childhood has come to stand by the death-bed of His Cross. He turns upon her His eyes, half blinded by pain, and yet filled with unspeakable tenderness. She gazes back upon the bleeding, dying form of her Son. He knows full well what is passing in His mother's heart, and He has time, even in the midst of His great work for the salvation of a lost world, to turn aside and care for her. His next words from the Cross are words of divine thoughtfulness, hallowing the ties of family and home. To His Beloved Disciple He gives this sacred, solemn charge: "Behold thy mother," and to His faithful mother this: "Woman, behold thy Son." ²

¹ St. Luke xxiii. 42, 43.

² St. John xix. 26, 27

And from that hour that disciple took her to his own home. Thus, in the time of His severest trial, we find Him caring with the utmost tenderness for the pure and loving mother, who had followed Him through life and even unto death, transfiguring His Cross and Passion with the splendour of sublime unselfishness.

Here then we have another great and precious lesson from the Cross. We find our Lord, even in the midst of His sharpest agony, when every word cost Him a pang of pain, when we might have expected to find His whole being absorbed in the tremendous struggle against sin and death, praying for His murderers, promising Paradise to a repentant thief, and providing His widowed mother with a home. It is the loftiest example of unselfish care for others which the world has ever seen. The loving face of Jesus looking down from the Cross, in pity upon his murderers, in pardon upon the penitent thief, and in fond affection on His mother and St. John, is the very incarnation of that perfect love which casteth out fear, yes, even the fear of death. Love is stronger than death. Death cannot quench nor kill it. Love lives after death, it reaches its perfection and finds its full fruition beyond the grave. Even in the hour of death perfect love can cast out all fear. The heart that beats warm with love

for God cannot be chilled by death's cold hand. The mind that is filled with loving thoughtfulness for its friends and fellowmen, busied with care for their highest interests, has no room left in it for the fear of death. Like the soul of our dying Lord, it finds strength and peace in loving "its own unto the end."

Let us then take home this lesson to our hearts. Love is stronger than death. It triumphs over death and takes away its sting. When we have filled our hearts full of love to God and love to man we can smile serenely into the face of death. In the power of a self-forgetting, undying love we can look with unshaken confidence through the shadows of death to the life beyond the grave.

"For then shall break eternal day,
And breathe from far life-giving air,
And life be Love, and Death be dead."

HOLY WEEK.

The Mastery Over Death.

MAUNDY THURSDAY.

THE BLESSING OF A FINISHED LIFE.

“It is finished.”—*St. John xix. 30.*

OUR Blessed Lord still hangs upon the Cross, but His sufferings are drawing to a close. The bitter cry of loneliness is hushed, and the mysterious darkness has given way to light. The sacred life is closing now, is even at an end. The parched lips and burning tongue of the Great Sufferer have but one word to speak to us. It is the mightiest and most meaningful word ever spoken by the tongue of man, for it announces the salvation of a lost world.

“It is finished.” How various are the meanings which it bears to those who hear its solemn sound.

1. To the enemies of the Crucified it speaks of victory won. He who has so long defied

and baffled them is in their grasp at last. He who has saved others cannot save Himself. They see Him dying now, dying a death of shame. God has not interfered to save Him nor to punish them. They have utterly destroyed Him from off the face of the earth.

2. To the few faithful friends who watch timidly beside His Cross, the words sound like the knell of hope. "It is finished." All is over now. He whom they had trusted as the Redeemer of Israel is dying now. As they gaze upon His tired bleeding form, one by one their fondest hopes are falling dead. Never again shall they walk and talk with Him by silvery lake, or in the garden, or on the lonely mountain-side. Scattered and humbled, all their high hopes gone, they will seek their homes again, and wait for another Christ. Such are their coward thoughts. So little have they learned to know of what His life and death should be.

3. But for Himself, how full of joy and satisfaction is the word. To His weary body and heavy laden soul, how glad must be the sound. After the storm and strain through which He has struggled on to the end, how sweet must be the promised rest. How complete, how glorious, is the triumph opened up to the eye of faith by that word of power.

“‘It is finished.’ O! what pleasure
Do the precious words afford!
Heavenly blessings without measure
Flow to us from Christ the Lord.

‘It is finished!’
Saints, the dying word record.

Finished all the types and shadows
Of the ceremonial law;
Finished all that God has promised;
Death and hell no more shall awe.

‘It is finished!’
Saints, from hence your comfort draw.”

This word of our Lord from the Cross is The Toiler's Cry of Triumph. God has given Him a great work to do—a double work: to make known God to men, and to bring men back to God. To accomplish this tremendous task has been the master-purpose of His earthly life. By the well of Sychar He declared, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work.”¹ Every energy of His being, every moment of His time, has been devoted to that work. Since the first glad day when He began to be about His Father's business, He has toiled day and night and taken no rest. And now the great work of atonement is done. The patient life of toil, the long nights of fervent prayer, the weary journeys over land and sea, the desperate struggles with

¹ St. John iv. 34.

the powers of sin are at an end. "Father, the hour is come. I have glorified Thee on the earth, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. I have manifested Thy name unto the men which Thou gavest Me out of the world. And now, I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee." ¹

This word is also the Sufferer's Cry of Relief. The work which our Blessed Lord had undertaken to do in the world could not be accomplished without intense suffering. No great and good work can. Nor can there be any full-grown character which is not matured by suffering. But now the life of patient endurance which began in the manger of Bethlehem, and deepened into the mystery of the Passion, has culminated in the awful agony of the Cross. "It is finished." All that the Scriptures foretold of the Man of Sorrows has been fulfilled. The powers of hell have done their worst. The bitter cup of suffering has been drained to the dregs. The full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice has been made. To the aching limbs, the bleeding hands, the broken heart, the tortured soul, relief has come at last. The Chief Sufferer is entering into His rest.

"It is finished." Sometime these words will be said of our life in this world. They

¹ St. John xvii. 1, 4, 6, 11.

will mean a great deal to us. God's calls ended, our opportunities gone, our probation past, our lifework stopped, our gifts of grace consumed, our last communion made, our last word spoken, the last scene of life closed. Our friends will reverently lower our mortal body into its last resting-place and pass their verdict upon our life. What will they be able to say of us in that day? Can they say that our work is done, that we have finished the work which God gave us to do? Or will they say, "It is such a pity, so sad, such an unfinished life, cut off before it began to bear fruit, so much left undone which ought to have been done?"

What shall we ourselves be able to say of our life in that day when we are called upon to give it back to God? He has entrusted it to us, not simply that we may keep it for Him or use it for ourselves, but that we may *use it for Him*. He has given us a work to do in this world, a definite work, wisely chosen for us by Him, and which we alone can do. He has appointed certain trials for us to bear, certain temptations for us to meet and overcome. Upon our accomplishment of this God-given task depends our eternal destiny. To finish it is to fulfill the chief end of our being, to make a success of life, to gratify God and win Heaven for ourselves. To leave it undone is

to squander the most splendid opportunities, prove ourselves unfaithful to a sacred trust, grieve our good God, and risk all our hopes of happiness. When we have finished our work we can go hence without fear, for we know that henceforth "there is laid up for us a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give." ¹ Death is shorn of one of its chief terrors, the fear of an offended God. He who can lay down his lifework at the feet of God and say, "It is finished," need not be afraid of death.

Let us set ourselves anew to-day to strive after a finished life; a life full of deeds of faith, and love, and Christian kindliness; full perhaps of toil and trial, but *done* bravely to the end. Let us resolve to find out what is the special work which God has given us to do and bend all our energies to finish it.

¹ II. St. Timothy iv. 8.

HOLY WEEK.

The Mastery Over Death.

GOOD FRIDAY.

THE SURRENDER OF THE SOUL.

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit; and having said this, he gave up the ghost.—*St. Luke xxiii. 46.*

WE are to listen to-day to the last words of our Saviour from the Cross, and are to learn from them our final lesson how to die. There is no weakness nor wavering now. With a voice firm, and clear, and strong, the Divine Martyr speaks. Full of serene faith and kingly power are His words. They place His soul forever beyond the reach of death. "Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." The body hangs upon the Cross, but the sacred head is bowed in token of a willing surrender to the powers of death. The marks of the long strife are there, the wounds are open, and the thorns still pierce the pallid brow. But the mangled

hands and feet feel no more pain, the pulse is still, the broken heart has ceased to throb, the closed eyes no longer see the staring crowd, the tired body is at rest. The soul, too, is free. Far from the scorn of men and free from satan's power, it lies in the arms of God. No more of shame and grief and loneliness for it, but rest and peace and glory by the great white throne. A few hours of rest in Paradise, a few days of lingering on this earth again, and then—"for-ever with the Lord."

Notice the superb sense of power with which our Saviour surrenders His soul into His Father's hands. It is not rent from Him against His will by the powers of death. He plucks it away out of those hostile hands and commits it to His Father's care. The soldiers have never seen a victim of the cross die in so short a time. Those who hang by His side will live on till death comes to their release. But He dies by His own free act. No power in Heaven or earth constrains Him to lay down His life. Of His own free will He lays it in His Father's hands. He deposits it in a safe place, from whence, after the crisis of death is past, in the bright dawn of the first Easter Day, it shall be restored to Him. He seems to say within Himself, "I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I

have committed to Him against that day.”¹ And so, in the exercise of resistless power, He removes His soul out of the reach of all the enemies by whom it is beset, into the shelter and safe-keeping of His Father’s House. And thus He robs the powers of darkness of their prey.

Our dying Saviour teaches us how to die; when all is finished, giving up our souls gladly and fearlessly into the embrace of God, “as into the hands of a faithful Creator and most merciful Saviour.” We need fear no evil. “There shall no torment touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure is taken for misery, and their going from us to be utter destruction, but they are in peace.”² The Christian soul at death goes not out into the dark, nor into the grasp of remorseless enemies. It passes into the strong and loving hands of God. By commending it to Him we can place it far above, out of the reach of harm. The surrender of the soul to God overcomes much of the sharpness of death, and converts the victory of the grave into defeat. It emancipates our higher, truer, real self from the obedience of death. When our Blessed Lord had commended His spirit into His Father’s hands He was willing, ready,

¹ II. St. Timothy, i. 12.

² Wisdom iii. 1-3.

yes, anxious to die. Even so the Christian who has surrendered his soul, is ready to go Home to God. He knows that for Him to depart and be with Christ is far better than to linger here, and He obeys his Master's call with joy.

To the Christian, then, it is not a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God. To him whom it finds following Christ in the Way of the Cross, death means freedom from toil, and pain, and sin. It means to be with Christ, "to feel, to see Him near." It means to be with "all the saints who from their labours rest." It means unbroken peace and safety for the soul. It means that all the shadows which sin and death have flung across the pathway of life have fled away, and the sweet old prophecy is coming true—"At evening time it shall be light."¹ As the awful darkness rolled away, and the light of the Father's countenance shone on the closing scene of the Sacrifice of the Cross, so every surrender of a soul to God at death lets in a flood of glory, as the "day breaks and the shadows flee away." How many a faithful pastor, standing beside the death-bed of a Christian soul and commending it to God, has seen the light of Paradise break in upon the soul and drive away all fear

¹ Zechariah xiv. 7.

of death. How many an one has witnessed the fulfillment of God's precious promise to the soul, "I will ransom thee from the power of the grave, I will redeem thee from death. O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction." ¹

When our Lord commends His soul into His Father's hands, He teaches us how to die. But He teaches us at the same time how to live. If we would die the death of the righteous, we must live the life of the righteous. If we would commend our souls to God in death, we must commend them to Him now in the time of this mortal life. We must be faithful, true, and obedient followers of His life, if we would have our last end like His. Being closely united to Him, He will be our hope and stay in life and in death. Then, "whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord's." ²

"Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit." These have been the last words of a multitude of God's saints. Borrowing them from their Lord, they have made them their own dying words. Hallowed by the use of our Blessed Lord and of hundreds of His most faithful followers, they are the best of all words in

¹ Hosea xiii. 14.

² Romans xiv. 8.

which to surrender up the soul to God. Let us resolve to-day that, if possible, they shall be our own last words in this world. Let us take them to ourselves, and treasure them up in our hearts, and use them often while we live, and have them ready when we die.

HOLY WEEK.

The Mastery Over Death.

EASTER EVEN.

AFTER DEATH.

“Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise.”—*St. Luke xxiii. 43.*

It is the Great Sabbath of the Passover. An unbroken calm broods over the Holy City, with its multitudes of pilgrim worshippers; over Calvary, with its empty crosses and trampled summit, and all its pathetic signs of recent tragedy; over Joseph's garden with its new-made sepulchre and guard of Roman soldiery. Within the rock-hewn chamber of death, the sacred form now rests in peace. How sweet and blessed is its rest! Yesterday dragged along the way of sorrows, nailed to the cruel Cross, held up to the scorn of men, pierced with the sharp thrust of the spear; now laid by loving hands in the silence and seclusion of the tomb, with angels standing by, at rest. The little band of faithful followers have this to comfort

them, even in their despair,—the lifeless body of their Lord is theirs again, and is beyond the reach of harm. They have laid it with reverential tenderness, “Where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary be at rest.”¹

But where is the soul of Jesus during this calm day? It left the tired body hanging on the Cross, and passed into the protecting hands of God. It entered the place of departed spirits, that vast waiting place of human souls, where all who have ever drawn the breath of life await the coming of the great Judgment Day. To those who have known and loved God, it is a home of rest, and peace, and growing nearness to their Lord. To him “who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace,” to such as have deliberately and defiantly rejected Him, it is a state of unrest, “a fearful looking for of judgment.”² In this border-land of Eternity, in that happy part of it which He describes as Paradise, His human soul awaits the Resurrection Day.

The most triumphant, kingly promise which He ever made was that with which amidst the

¹ Job iii. 17.

² Hebrews x. 27, 29.

shame and suffering of the Cross He gladdened the heart of the penitent thief. "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Above the hoarse clamour of the mob, in face of all the remorseless powers which were dragging Him down to the grave, out of the black shadows of impending death, ring out the clear tones of that splendid promise, which only divine power could execute. It was the death sentence of death itself. Jesus Christ on the Cross, face to face with death, feeling its cold hand upon Him, and painfully conscious of its power over Him, felt also His power over it, knew that it could not hurt His soul, and spoke with serene confidence of His life in Paradise after death. And more than that, He promised the same blessed life to His fellow-sufferer. That promise did not fail. The soul of the Convert of the Cross is with that of his new-found Lord in Paradise.

Think what Easter Even is to the penitent thief. By virtue of those kingly words he is with all those holy souls who have loved God and whom God loves. He has gone out of the visible into the invisible, apart forever from the tumults and strifes and troubles of this unquiet world, into the rest and peace and security of Paradise. And what is his highest happiness there? Is it not told us fully in these words of

our Lord: "To-day shalt thou be *with Me* in Paradise?" To be with Christ is the highest height of human happiness, is the best thing God has to give. The thief timidly asked a place in the remembrance of his Lord, and is given a place at His side. Thus God ever gives more than we desire or deserve, and His best and sweetest gift is to be with Christ. The Beloved Disciple never tires of telling us how he leaned on his Master's breast at the Eucharist, but how much better to be with Him in Paradise.

Our Lord's promise from the Cross is not limited in its scope. If we will have it, it extends to and includes us. We can make it a blessed reality for ourselves. If we take Him for our Lord, death will only be to us the door into Paradise, the breaking down of all barriers between us and Him. Where is the sting of death and the victory of the grave, if we can hear ringing out through the gathering shadows those cheering words, "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise?" It is the voice of the Master crying aloud to us, "Come forth with joy, O Christian soul. Come apart from the body, away from the misery of a sinful world, beyond all reach of harm, into the audience chamber of the Great King. I say no longer, whither I go, ye cannot come. I will

show thee the path of life. In My presence is the fulness of joy, and at My right hand there is pleasure for evermore. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Our Lenten meditations are drawing to a close. The end of them is at hand. We have tried to draw nigh to God, and we may be assured that He has drawn nigh to us, even though we knew it not. He is not far from any of us now, if we will but feel after Him and find Him. Let us keep close to Him after Lent is gone, and cherish the lessons He has taught us in these forty days. Our striving for the mastery is but just begun. Let us try to continue it according to the pattern given us by St. Paul, and shown us on Mount Calvary.

There is nothing in this world better and sweeter than a well-kept Lent. Let us offer up ours, such as it is, to God. If we feel that it has been kept very feebly, very imperfectly, let us still offer it up to Him, confessing that we are at best but unprofitable servants, and beseeching Him to have compassion upon our infirmities, and that those things which in our unworthiness we dare not, or in our blindness cannot ask, He may vouchsafe to give us for the sake of His Son.

May our Incarnate and Risen Lord grant us a bright and blessed Easter-tide. May His

Presence be with us, making itself known to us in the Breaking of Bread, causing our hearts to burn within us while we commune with Him, and abiding with us till the day is far spent, and the evening of life is at hand. Then may He mercifully grant that "through the grave and gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection; for His merits, who died, and was buried, and rose again for us."

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